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Mother Nature Network
Ad man Joel Babbit sees green
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The BBQ Guide

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By Lisa Mowry

Cover photograph by Iain Bagwell; styling by Angie Mosier; retouching by Patrick White

PHOTOGRAPH BY NEDA ABGHARI

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→ON THE SCENE

The Atlanta Magazine Photo Library is stocked with party pics from our exclusive events—like last month's Top Doctors reception—as well as galleries from galas covered by Rich Eldredge (page 28). Stop by and try to pick yourself out!

PLUS Get up to speed on toast-of-the-town events—like next month's Give Me Five dinner at East Lake Golf Club—with our Social Datebook party calendar, accessible via Rich Eldredge's ATL Intel blog.

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THIS MONTH'S POLL

How does Georgia rate as a BBQ state?
a) Rib-crackin' good! We can run with the best of them. b) Decent, but we lack a defining flavor a la Kansas City or Carolina. c) Lousy. I stick to fried chicken around these parts.

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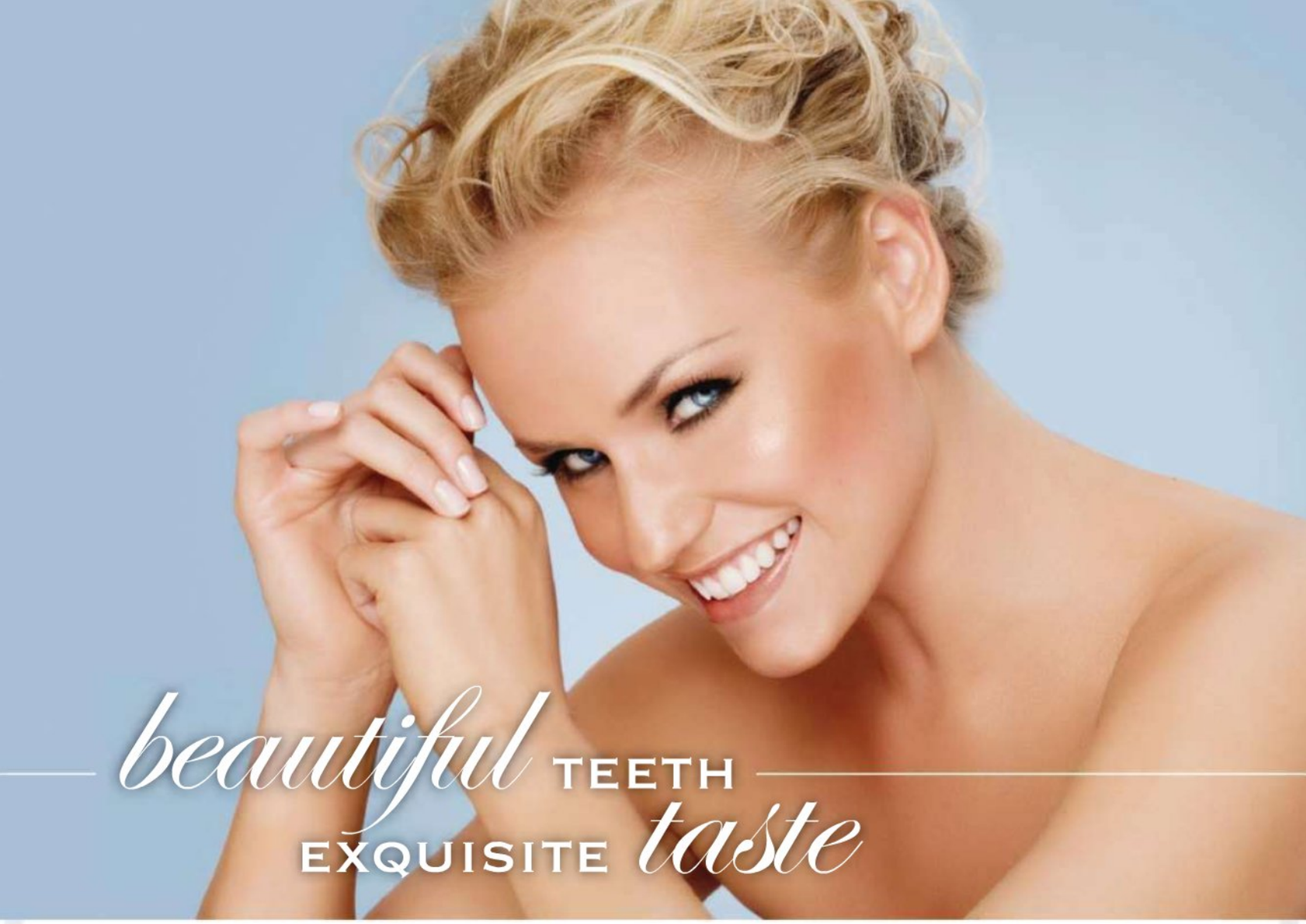

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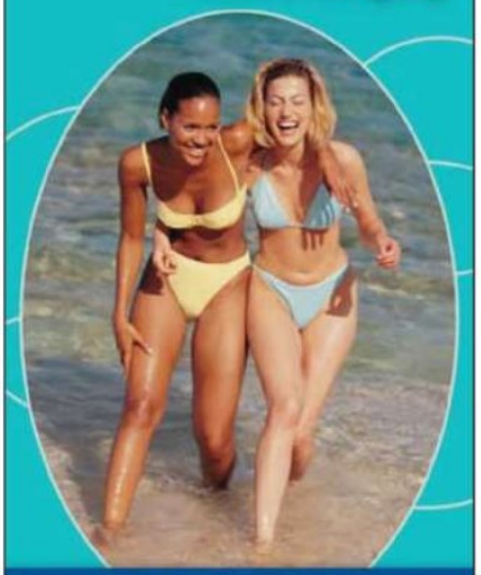

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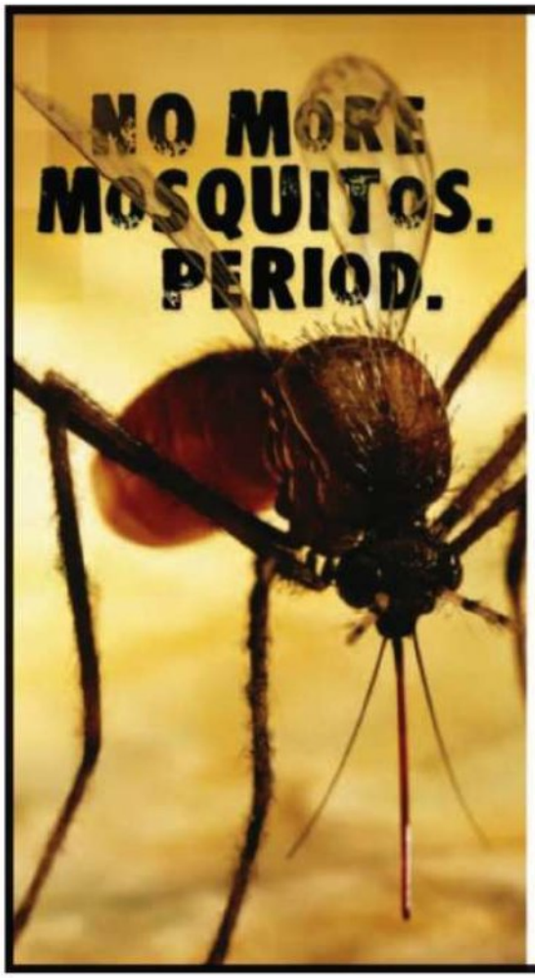
Southbound Summer Travel Directory 120

In this reader-friendly guide to destinations across the South, we spotlight favorite vacation towns, give our best bets for summer festivals and exhibitions, and let readers know what new and noteworthy at the region's top attractions.



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Jim Auchmutey
Auchmutey, who explored the definition of Georgia barbecue for our cover package (page 53), was a feature writer and editor with the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* for almost thirty years. He was twice named Cox Newspapers' Writer of the Year for his stories about the South and his native Atlanta. The coauthor of two cookbooks, Auchmutey has been honored by the James Beard Foundation for his food writing and is working on an illustrated history of barbecue. His favorite barbecue place? Fresh Air in Jackson, for sentimental reasons.

Iain Bagwell
When Bagwell moved here from London in 2003, he'd never eaten barbecue. But after a birthday visit to Swallow at the Hollow, he was hooked. Bagwell returned to Swallow to shoot this month's cover, although not without some challenges: "We had everything set up and ready to shoot, and with impeccable timing a huge summer storm rolled in and completely ruined our setup," he says. The bright side: "It gave us some time to try some of the delicious ribs!" Bagwell's other clients include Publix, Weight Watchers, and Kraft Foods.

Jessica Hische
Hische, a freelance typographer and illustrator working in Brooklyn, New York, designed the hand-lettering for "Mother Nature's Daddy" (page 72). Her clients have included Tiffany & Co., Chronicle Books, and the *New York Times*, and she has been featured in most major design and illustration publications, including *Communication Arts*, *Print*, and the *Graphis Design Annual*. Hische's work has earned her recognition as an up-and-coming artist on lists such as *Step*'s 25 Emerging Talents for 2009 and *Print*'s New Visual Artists 2009.

MY WAY HOME FROM WORK takes me past Fox Bros. Bar-B-Q on DeKalb Avenue, and it astounds me how they consistently draw lines that snake out the door. They have satisfying barbecue (the Tomminator—Tater Tots covered in Brunswick stew and melted cheese—is my personal favorite), but other places with barbecue just as compelling don't attract near the crowds. It's not unusual to see cars on the grass, cars on the curb, cars parked halfway to McLendon Avenue. Part of it's the exposure on a busy street, not to mention the friendly Candler Park neighborhood that makes the place an easy walk. Part of it's the layout of the place—bright and airy, loud and convivial. The Fox brothers themselves are Texas-born, but while the Lone Star State's influence is detectable in their food, they label their style as Southern—"where we are from and where we are at."

That would make for a good headline for Jim Auchmutey's essay on page 53, which kicks off our ambitious survey of the metro Atlanta barbecue scene. Jim, an Atlanta native, set out to determine precisely what the Georgia style of barbecue is, or if it even exists. For better or worse, other areas of the country—Texas, North Carolina, Memphis, Kansas City—have staked out unique and identifiable variations on the theme. Does Georgia have one? I'll leave that for Jim to answer, but I'm not giving anything away by saying that no matter what style you're a fan of, you're bound to find it here. Bill Addison, our dining editor and restaurant critic, reviewed fifty-eight barbecue joints around the metro area, but only a deadline and his (presumably) soaring cholesterol numbers kept him from going on and on.

I accompanied Bill on just one outing, which took us all the way to Cartersville and Scott's Walk-Up Bar-B-Q, a small operation where the owner, Scott Panter, will guide you through the three homemade sauces (also available for sale, and now in my pantry) you can drizzle on his fantastic baby back ribs. It was a perfect late spring evening, capped off with Scott's sinful peach cobbler; if I'd spent it close to home, I could easily have ended up at Fox Bros., waiting a half hour for a table. Instead I was forty-five miles away, enjoying some of the best food I'd had in a long time. That night I came to my own conclusions about what Georgia barbecue is: a great excuse to take the long way home, because you never know what awesome discoveries await.

Steve

Steve Fennessy
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ACCESS Feedback

Waiting on Streets of Buckhead

YOU SAY SOME of the real losers are the 50,000 motorists who have to drive by and see the unfinished project ("Will This Ever Actually Happen?" by Thomas Lake, May). But how about the runners and walkers who have lost their sidewalk for two blocks on the north side of Peachtree Road between Pharr and Paces Ferry? This is the real tragedy. Thousands of Buckhead residents are affected by this every week. Even if you choose to walk on the south side, you're forced to cross perhaps the busiest intersection in Buckhead because of the Peachtree and Roswell roads fork. It's going on two years now with no sidewalk, with no return date in sight. If Mr. Carter is so dedicated to Buckhead, maybe he could at least look into pushing back the barriers a few feet and giving his former neighbors their sidewalk back.

DEAN MEGLIO
Buckhead

A life remembered

I WANT TO COMMEND your magazine and Thomas Lake for the article you published on my friend John Behnken and his tragic death from H1N1 ("The Golden Boy and the Invisible Army," June). I want to thank you and Thomas for treating him, his wife Angela, and their story with the respect and compassion that it deserved. John was my best friend and the best man at my wedding. I remember the first time he told me about Angela—the way he talked about her, it didn't surprise me when he proposed to her.

He was an amazing guy, and even though people would jokingly call him Golden Boy, it wasn't because he was especially lucky. It was because he worked hard for the things he wanted. It just seemed like luck because he always had a joke and a laugh at the ready.

Hopefully this story will give people that didn't know John a glimpse of how lucky those that were close to him were to have him in our lives.

The world is less bright without John Behnken in it.

ETHAN STOOPS
Anchorage, Alaska

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I WANT TO THANK BOTH your magazine and Thomas Lake for the article about my husband, John Behnken. I was very hesitant to talk to Tom at first, but curiosity and the chance to tell John's story won over. I didn't know exactly what to expect, but Tom handled the article with sensitivity and grace, and I am so proud to see John's story out there for other people to read. When Tom first met with me, I asked some of John's closest friends to come over as support/bodyguards/sounding boards, knowing that they would represent John. Tom pretty much won us all over after he sat through about four hours of stories, and we weren't even done then. I'm pretty sure John is wondering why we decided to make a "big deal" about him, but that's exactly why we needed to do this. He was a big deal and was such a beautiful person. He wouldn't have ever thought of himself this way, but he was a rock for all of us. Telling his story is a way to keep him going in our hearts.

ANGELA BEHNKEN
Johns Creek

Not all top docs are on a list

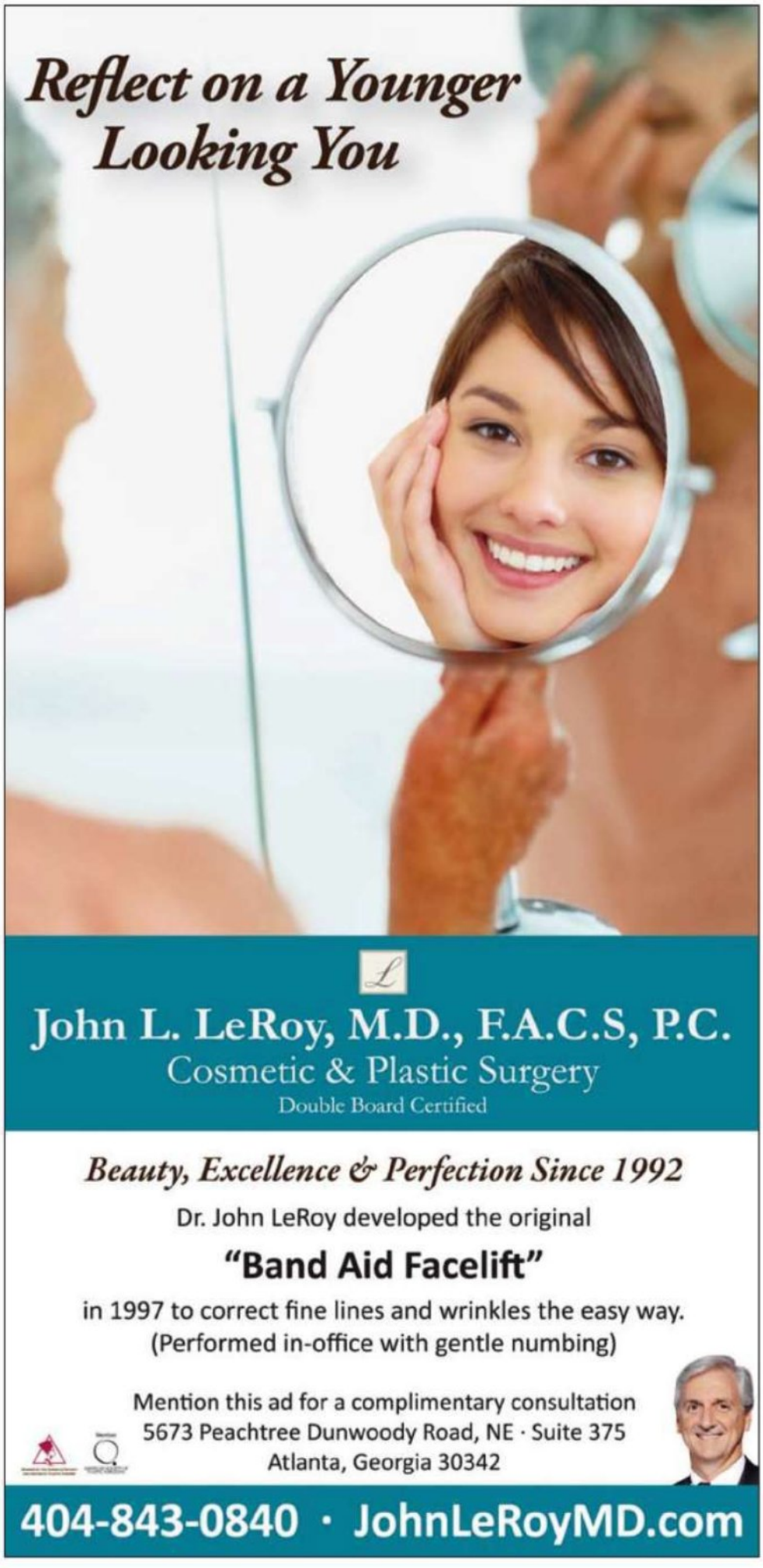
BEING NAMED AS TOP DOCTORS in Atlanta is truly an honor ("Top Doctors," June). However, readers should recognize that we, like many others listed, are proud to work with other thoughtful, thorough, excellent physicians in our practices and that Georgians are fortunate to be served by these other top doctors who are simply less well known.

Also unmentioned, but critical to being "top doctors," are the committed and caring clinical and administrative staff who support and facilitate our efforts to deliver outstanding care to our patients every day.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of healthcare excellence and helping to define it.

STANLEY A. COHEN, M.D.
BENJAMIN D. GOLD, M.D.
Children's Center for Digestive Health Care, Atlanta

Letters may be edited for clarity and length. Write to us at letters@atlantamag.emmis.com, or Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta* magazine, 260 Peachtree Street, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30303



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- ☐ BRAVE CLASS V RAPIDS
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- ☐ DRIVE THE ANTEBELLUM TRAIL
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Blessed Are the Mirthful

A wisecracking, Baptist-raised comic helps women laugh at themselves

by CANDICE DYER

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE TOFANELLI

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ANITA RENFROE JOKES that she used to sleep with her pastor.

"Now he's my road manager, so I'm sleeping with my roadie," she says, referring to John, her husband of almost thirty years and an ordained Baptist evangelist. For Renfroe, an Acworth-based humorist who packs arenas around the country with her faith-based schtick, comedy can be a ministry, its benedictions peppered with punchlines.

"I definitely am a believer in God with a sense of humor," she says. "There are too many ironies in the universe to believe that He doesn't have one. Plus, I'm pretty sure I've sensed it every time I've made plans that I believe are 'ironclad.'"

Renfroe is the flouncy, unselfconscious jester of suburban middle age.

Renfroe, forty-eight, unexpectedly shot to fame in 2007 when a YouTube video of her "Total Momsense," a rapid-fire litany of maternal catchphrases set to the "William Tell Overture," went viral, jettisoning her into the talk-show circuit.

"I went from being a stay-at-home mom, playing piano for small women's church groups where I'd crack jokes between songs, to a comedic phe-mom-enon," she says, brushing back coppery bangs.

The *New York Times Magazine* anointed her a "postmillennial Erma Bombeck," and Renfroe began bantering with Diane Sawyer on *Good Morning America* as a regular correspondent "embedded in the front lines of motherhood—protected by Spanx instead of Kevlar."

Describing her medium as "estrogen-flavored musical comedy," Renfroe has established herself as the flouncy, unself-conscious jester of suburban middle age, hamming it up with bits about cellulite, bad hair, and perimenopause. Drawing from dewier divas to celebrate her own demographic, she mimics Beyoncé's jiggly dance moves in a spoof called "All the Wrinkled Ladies," and the "Romeo" in Renfroe's send-up of Taylor Swift's treacly "Love Story" is a harried hubby who turns heartthrob when he finds a sitter and drives his wife off in a minivan.

"She says the things you think but don't say," observes *Good Morning America* producer Margo Baumgart. Take Renfroe's description of mammograms for "bigger girls": "too much waffle mix in the waffle iron."

Hollywood, sensing a female Jeff Foxworthy in her deadpan drawl, has beckoned, and Renfroe recently developed and starred in a sitcom pilot based on her life, featuring Ryan Stiles as her good-sport husband and the late Dixie Carter as mother-in-law. With the show still in the works and some newly released DVDs of stand-up routines, Renfroe is reaching out to a more diverse audience while keeping the faith, wrestling daily with the question of whether she is a "Christian comedian" or a "comedian who is a Christian."

"The answer is yes," she says, eyes gleaming. "Christian is who I am; funny is what I do. The people making the decisions don't care if I'm Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or atheist."

Besides, as a devout woman with a pointedly "smart mouth" who grew up in a poker-faced religious environment, she understands the peculiar conundrum of reverence within irreverence. She takes her faith, but not herself, seriously.

"The woman in the Bible that I think may reflect my sensibilities would have to be Sarah," Renfroe says. Sarah laughed when angels told Abraham she would bear a child in old age. "I've always had trouble with inappropriate laughter," says Renfroe. "Fortunately, I'm usually the one causing it these days." ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE CARPENTER

ON STAGE

Playhouse in Paradise

SINCE 2006, THE SERENBE COMMUNITY has gently manicured a reputation for bucolic bliss. This summer, among the carrots and strawberries, the sleepy town of 200 is cultivating its own professional theater company.

But don't expect the new Serenbe Playhouse to produce the theatrical equivalent of Fourth of July parades and hand-churned ice cream. Brian Clowdus—its ebullient, Alabama-born, Amherst College–educated director—has little interest in staging what he laughingly calls "the thirty-seventh revival" of *Hello, Dolly!* Instead, he is inaugurating the courtyard venue with the likes of *John & Jen*, a quirky two-person musical by *Addams Family* composer Andrew Lippa (through July 4), and *Shakespeare's R&J*, the classic as read by four young guys at a Catholic boarding school (July 16 to 25).

"I want everyone to leave each piece thinking about something and not just thinking, 'Oh, that was fun and I was entertained,'" says Clowdus, who has already impressed his employer, the Serenbe Institute for Art, Culture & the Environment, headed by former Woodruff Arts Center president and CEO Shelton G. Stanfill. —WENDELL BROCK

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Dick Lane, a former East Point recreational director and Georgia legislator, played a major role in developing the track. See dicklanevelodrome.com for info on upcoming races and classes.

Spin Cycle

Go for a ride at the Dick Lane Velodrome

EAST POINT'S DICK LANE VELODROME began as a dream of some locals enchanted with the pristine cycling arena of the 1972 Munich Olympics. Problem was, these boosters were oblivious to international metric cycling standards, and they based their track on the mile. As a result, the 1974 oval falls ten meters short of standard dimensions, requiring unconventional lap measurements for Olympic-style races. It's also uncommonly slippery and slopes a bit quirkily on both sides—not to mention it's probably the only velodrome in the world with a tree growing in its infield and a stream running through the center.

It's no gold-medal standard, but racers love the Velodrome and pros train here year-round. "Other tracks, which are more traditional, can be a little dull," explains Wayne Whitesides, a retired pro cyclist and consummate volunteer here.

The track draws cheering fans on major race days. Families, fixed-gear hipsters, and couples on dates whoop and ring cowbells as cyclists veer around the sharp curves. Succulent concessions (Asian wrap, anyone?), beer (sometimes), and announcer Scott Patton's larger-than-life commentary stir up the crowd.

The surface is banked at a thirty-six-degree angle, and cyclists reach top speeds of nearly fifty miles an hour, pedaling like mad just inches apart. Their bikes don't have brakes, nor can they stop without wiping out. Smashups don't happen as often as you'd think in races with rules such as these: There's the Madison, which calls for tag-team riders to hand-sling each other into the action, and the Keirin, in which cyclists draft a speeding motorized bike. "Of course, spectators come out to watch the crashes, too," admits Whitesides. —KATE SWEENEY

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEATH PATTERSON

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- ☐ Georgia Aquarium
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- ☐ Centennial Olympic Park
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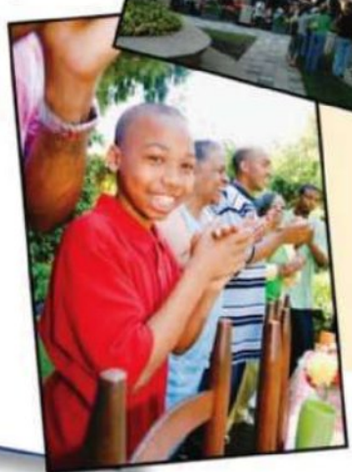
- ☐ And so much more!



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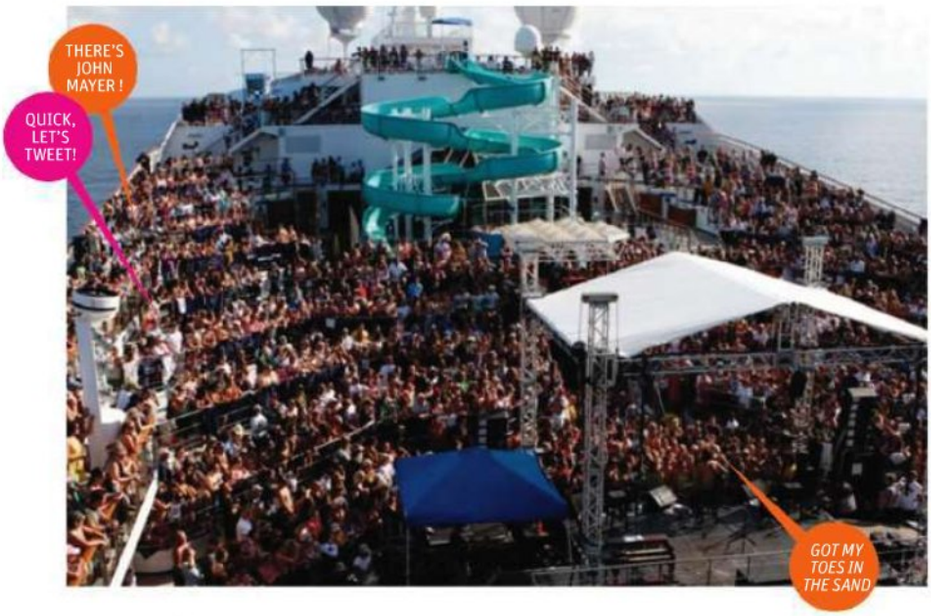

LOCAL BIZ

Come Sail Away

Sixthman is in the business of rocking the boat

ABOUT HALF OF GRANT PARK–BASED Sixthman's twenty-eight employees have just returned from a cruise to Grand Cayman with Kid Rock and 2,000 of his screaming, adoring, tattooed, and bikinied fans. But CEO Andy Levine and his staff weren't sunning on the lido deck or sipping mai tais. They were hustling to run concerts and contests, organizing meet and greets and autograph sessions with the bands on the cruise's lineup. They paused for a beer only after their midnight staff meeting.

A decade ago, Levine was the manager for alterna-pop band Sister Hazel when they decided to reward loyal fans. You know, a cookout or something. Then Levine met a travel agent with a better idea: What about a cruise?

The thought of being trapped at sea with superfans could give the friendliest bands pause, but Sister Hazel was in. "We did not want the stigma of shuffleboard and bingo; that was the only concern," says front man Ken Block of the first cruise in 2001, dubbed the Rock Boat. He shouldn't have worried. Despite working around nonfan passengers, Levine turned the trip into a "rock-and-roll lovefest," says Block.

After the success of the first Rock Boat, Levine knew he wanted it to be an annual event. And that he wanted the whole boat. (Price to rent: $750,000. Up front.) Sixthman—a reference to the supporting role that sports fans play—was born.

There have been choppy moments (note: It's not good to run out of beer in the Bahamas), but the company has learned how to run a good party barge. It now manages about a dozen voyages each year to ports such as St. Croix and Belize. Each cruise features the likes of Emmylou Harris, John Mayer, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Zac Brown Band, a little-known group on previous Rock Boats that will host its own cruise this September (cabins were lately still up for grabs, starting at $699).

"We're like wedding planners for 2,200 brides, with twenty-two lead singers," says Levine. "If we're not delivering what we promised, they don't come back." Fortunately, 60 percent do return. Employees are happy too. They enjoy the casual office atmosphere, not to mention the working vacations. —AMANDA HECKERT

CHARLES AT LARGE

IS COBB ON BOARD?

Unlike Gwinnett, which has voted on MARTA a couple of times, Cobb County has never had a referendum on the Atlanta transit system since the authority was founded nearly forty years ago. Will we ever get rail up here? Tough time to ask that question: MARTA is staring down the wrong end of a $120 million operations deficit. Earlier this year, the transit authority threatened to cut 30 percent of its lines—until it got a last-minute reprieve from the state legislature, which temporarily freed up some sales tax revenue for operations. Says Faye DiMassimo, director of Cobb's Department of Transportation: "Community support and funding are the two things that have prevented MARTA's expansion. Funding, especially, is a dramatic deterrent."

But just because you won't be seeing MARTA in Cobb anytime soon doesn't mean you'll never see rail there. In 2008, the Transit Planning Board—a joint venture of MARTA, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority—developed "Concept 3," the Atlanta region's future transit vision. According to Sam Olens, who left his long-time post as Cobb County Commission chair in March, it was the first comprehensive metro transit study in more than four decades. Cobb is interested in rail, just not necessarily MARTA, says Olens. There's also interest in being part of a regional transit system that would not only stop in Cobb County, but would have significant infrastructure there. Unfortunately, the environmental impact studies alone are likely to take several years, and the project would have to obtain mostly local and federal funding.

→ ASK CHARLES Got an Atlanta question? E-mail askcharles@atlantamag.emmis.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL BYINGTON; ILLUSTRATION BY EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

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1 Ringo Starr

You got soaked watching Paul McCartney at Piedmont Park last year. Check another item off your bucket list by catching Ringo Starr at Chastain Park Amphitheatre. Let's hope it doesn't rain. (7/10)

2 Capitol City Opera

This annual pops concert and fundraiser, presented on the indoor courtyard of Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, has become a twenty-year tradition for some patrons. Pack a picnic basket and come savor an evening of Rodgers and Hammerstein classics, benefiting these aspiring local vocalists. (7/24)

3 Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery

Horizon Theatre brings back its first world premiere, originally staged in 1988: a play by Georgia-born Clark Atlanta alumna Shay Youngblood. The narrator—a motherless young African American woman—recalls coming of age during the 1960s under the guidance of eight feisty but wise Big Mamas. (7/2–8/22)

4 Fireworks!

Catch Independence Day pyrotechnics at Lenox Square (festivities begin at 6 p.m.), Centennial Olympic Park (live music and activities all day), or Stone Mountain (three days of laser shows and fireworks displays , 7/3–5).

5 Fruit Cocktails

Check out the Atlanta Botanical Garden's recent expansion with Thursday cocktails, which continue through September. This month's theme is Edibles and Infusions (as in vodka). There is also another blockbuster art glass exhibit—of hand-blown fruits and vegetables.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN

Little Five Points

Also on the calendar

1. *Phantom of the Opera* Farewell Tour (through 7/25, Fox Theatre)
2. Peachtree Road Race (7/4, Lenox Square to Piedmont Park)
3. *Hamlet! The Musical!* (7/9–8/8, Shakespeare Tavern)
4. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's *Planet Earth* (7/16, Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre at Encore Park)
5. Dave Matthews Band (7/27, Aaron's Amphitheatre at Lakewood)

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Party Animals

WHAT Zoo Atlanta's 2010 Beastly Feast **WHY** The evening celebrated the silver anniversary of the Ford Motor Company's presenting sponsorship of the African Rain Forest gorilla habitat. "I'm continuing a family tradition," said **Justin Farmer**, WSB anchor and event co-emcee. "My dad and stepmom [retired WSB anchors **Don Farmer** and **Chris Curle**] attended for years. Twenty-five years ago, Chris was among the first supporters and fundraisers of the gorilla habitat."

1. Stockbroker Trey Haydon with his wife, political consultant Chandler **2.** AT&T Georgia vice president Keith Holmes with wife Bridget **3.** Zoo Atlanta CFO Kathy Williams with husband Ralph **4.** Former Zoo Atlanta chairman of the board Mickey Brown with wife Carolyn **5.** Waffle House president and CEO Walt Ehmer and wife Cindy **6.** WSB anchor and event co-emcee Justin Farmer and wife Allison

QUOTE UNQUOTE

"There won't be any lying on the floor this time. At this age, getting up and down off the floor can represent a challenge."

—1980s home video exercise queen **JANE FONDA**, seventy-two, on her new exercise DVD for seniors. The longtime Poncey-Highland resident announced her move to L.A. in May.

COMING UP

MCC Returns

ON "THE WAY I FEEL," a track on her new album, *The Age of Miracles*, singer-songwriter **Mary Chapin Carpenter** races alone across the South in the middle of the night. Blowing east from Nashville, she sings, "Atlanta, it's been *way* too long." Indeed, on July 17 Carpenter returns to Chastain Park Amphitheatre for the first time since she suffered a pulmonary embolism that nearly killed her three years ago. *Miracles* emerged in the months following her recovery.

"If I thought about what happened to me every day, I would be paralyzed with fear," says Carpenter, fifty-two. "I choose not to go there. To me these new songs feel celebratory. They're a document of strength, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose with a little attitude thrown in." Carpenter says she's most missed that connection she feels when performing live. For years, her Atlanta

fans have celebrated Carpenter's annual Chastain appearance by dancing around the amphitheater in a conga line with illuminated pink flamingos when Carpenter performs her Grammy-winning hit "Down at the Twist and Shout." "The pink flamingos are peculiar to Atlanta," Carpenter laughs. "A few strays periodically show up in other cities, but nothing like Atlanta!"

The singer isn't revealing what songs from her twenty-three-year catalog she'll be performing this summer. "It's still a work in progress," she teases. "But just perhaps, there'll be something appropriate for conga-ing flamingos." ■

BEASTLY FEAST: CAROLINE KILGORE; JANE FONDA: MOSES ROBINSON/GETTY IMAGES; MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER: RUSS HARRINGTON

RICH'S TIPS »

Record your life story at **NPR'S STORYCORPS STUDIO AT WABE-FM**, one of the project's three permanent booths. "The accents may change, but the topics of lives and loves are universal," says founder **DAVE ISAY**. Also new: a free StoryCorps iPhone app.

Among the million-dollar additions to the **CHEETAH** strip club? A lobby big-screen TV with a live traffic report. Says owner **BILL HAGOOD**, "We're hoping customers take one look at the gridlock and decide to come back in and spend more time with the girls."

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Melanie Sumner

A CAVERNOUS SENSE OF LOSS PERMEATES *The Ghost of Milagro Creek* (Algonquin Books, $13.95 paperback), a tragic story of love and heartbreak and consequences set in the barrio of Taos, New Mexico. The title may refer to the incandescent spirit of Ignacia Vigil Romero—a Native American medicine woman (or witch?) who wields power and influence even from the grave—but another ghost haunts the pages of this luminous novel. Author Melanie Sumner, a native of Rome, Georgia, was living with her husband, David Marr, in the spectacular painted desert of Taos when he was diagnosed with a terminal illness. Within two years, he was gone. "Somehow the landscape I was writing about became imbued with his reckless and noble spirit," Sumner says from her home in Rome, where she lives now with her two children. Sumner's prose is a soulful tribute not only to her late husband, but also to the colorful cultures that define the contemporary American West. Her multigenerational story is captivating from the first page, and her gift for observation flourishes in the desert heat. "She wore high heels that could shave off a man's ear, and she looked like she wanted to," Sumner writes of Rocky, a mysterious girl capable of inspiring suicide (or murder) among blood brothers Mister and Tomas. "Silence surrounded her like a coming storm." Through police reports, eyewitness accounts, and caseworker interviews, Sumner constructs a tragedy as she crafts an indelible portrait of a community in quiet crisis. ■

SUMNER ON . . .

LINGUISTICS I am white, white, white, and I didn't speak a word of Spanish when I began writing this book. In Rome, I befriended a tree cutter from Belize who calls himself Jaguar Chenko. One summer, Jaguar let me follow him around with my notebook. He'd scramble up a tree with a machete in his teeth (okay, in his belt) and hack away, with the cell phone on his ear. I'd say, "How do you say, 'She was hot'?"

COMMON THREADS Just as there's always a Southerner in my story, no matter where it's set, there's always a matriarch. There's something about the way a woman of a certain age tells a story—I can lean back into it.

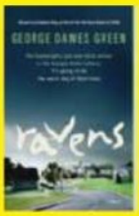
SETTING I have this strange need to miss a place before I can write about it. My longing for New Mexico inspired *The Ghost of Milagro Creek*. My next novel is set in Alaska, where I lived for two years in the late nineties.

SOUTHERN ROOTS We have a past we can't get away from. We tell stories. We love the music of the English language and tolerate ambiguity, perhaps even court it. We're like rich people who have been very poor, or poor people who have been very rich. I do consider myself a Southern writer, but I'll end up in New Mexico.

THE TRANSITION FROM WIFE TO WIDOW Soul mate. Soul mate gone.

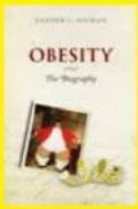
FOR OUR FULL INTERVIEW WITH SUMNER, VISIT ATLANTAMAGAZINE.COM

> ALSO NEW



RAVENS
Grand Central Publishing, $13.99 paperback
This intensely enjoyable novel of psychological terror by onetime Brunswick resident **George Dawes Green** (*The Juror*) made lots of best-of lists when it was released last year. Now available in paperback, it deserves an even wider audience. In Green's brilliant tale, a Georgia family wins a $318 million lottery and is taken hostage by two con men intent on squeezing the family for half the jackpot.

HOT SHOT
The Overlook Press, $24.95
Longtime Atlantan **Gary Ruffin**, a guitarist and songwriter for the 1970s rock band Smoke Rise, riffs on comic mystery in this debut novel set in a small town in Florida. Ruffin's music career ended after a 2001 operation to remove a brain tumor left him disabled. Now a published novelist, he says he is "happy to be working, and completely inspired."



OBESITY: THE BIOGRAPHY
Oxford University Press, $24.95
In the eighteenth century, obesity was a problem of the affluent, but nowadays it is the poorer classes—without benefit of personal trainers and Whole Foods—who are more likely to be overweight. **Sander L. Gilman**, a professor at Emory University, looks at the long history of obesity and society's ever-changing attitude toward the body.

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Friends of the shelter form a "human lifeline" around the building as a symbol of their resolve.

Pine Street Posse

The residents of the Peachtree Pine homeless shelter conspire to thwart their enemies

LATE IN THE SPRING, after the foreclosure, the Peachtree Pine homeless shelter Downtown was itself in danger of homelessness. Inside the brick walls, where 574 men sleep on an average night, the leaders prepared for a siege. They believed that the city's most powerful forces were allied against them. Some of the leaders lived in the shelter. They had nowhere else to go. On a gray Tuesday morning, about twenty of these resident volunteers gathered in a second-floor conference room with their executive director, Anita Beaty, age sixty-eight, also known as Mama.

She cleared her throat.

MAMA You may have noticed that we've been visited by officers of many different, I guess, security entities, or police agencies, on fishing expeditions, as you all know. That's what I call it, when they come here and say they need to come in and meet somebody, or they come to the door and try to browbeat somebody into letting them in. Without any warrant, without any authority. Just come in. And part of it, it seems to me, it tends toward harassment. Particularly now that we are struggling in court, and every single day, to protect our claim to this building. So last week there were [intruders] *trying to get in*. Under—

A MAN False pretenses.

MAMA —false pretenses. Exactly. And everybody who confronted them did a stellar job. We *do not* give names out. We do not even answer questions. Somebody says, "Have you seen this guy?" We don't answer that. We don't look at the picture and say, "Yes, he's here." But here's what you *can* say every single time. "Do you have a warrant?" Ninety times out of ninety-one times, they don't. "What are you here for?" And *don't let them in!*

MAN WITH BARITONE VOICE We had two police officers did that two weeks ago.

MAMA Did they get in?

BARITONE MAN Nope. I wouldn't let 'em.

MAMA Good.

BARITONE MAN I told 'em they needed to come by tomorrow morning. Right now, we can't help you. We have a confidentiality process, and we have to protect our clients. "Can't we just go in there?" No you *cannot*, sir.

MAMA [*softly*] Yes.

BARITONE MAN With all due respect, you *cannot*.

MAMA Yes. That's exactly the tone to take. And if you need to get Motley, get Motley.

CURTIS MOTLEY, HEAD OF SECURITY If you feel like it's anyone who's not familiar, or you think that's standing out, or you're not sure of, always come and get somebody, or try to seek and find out. We never know who of our enemies is trying to send someone in here to get some kind of dirt on us. Jerome?

JEROME BAKER I just wanted to say, you brought up a valiant point. You know, we have to be mindful and vigilant of everybody who comes in here. Especially when they're trying to come through that basement door. I was told of a situation where a security officer or a detective was in the building. Now, I don't know whether that was before I came back or not, but one of the RVs [resident volunteers] asked him, "Do you need something?" And he said he was just lookin' around. He said, "Who are you?" "I'm a detective." And showed him his badge. And he was promptly escorted out of the building. All I was saying was, we need to be vigilant and mindful with people who come in, because you can just about tell if a person is homeless when he come through that door.

MAMA Can't always tell if somebody's homeless or not by looking at them.

ANOTHER MAN You smell 'em.

[*Laughter all around*] ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINE KILGORE

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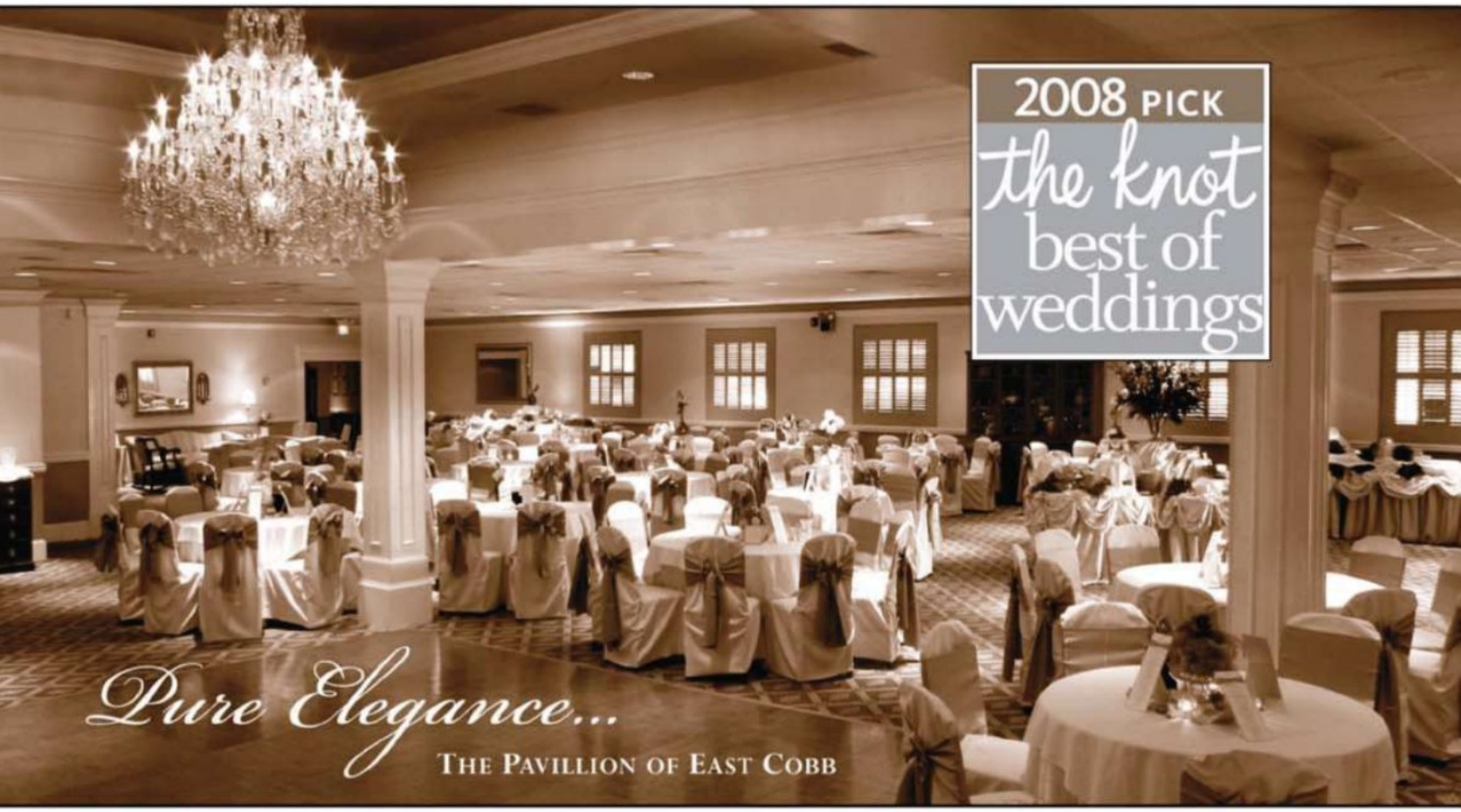

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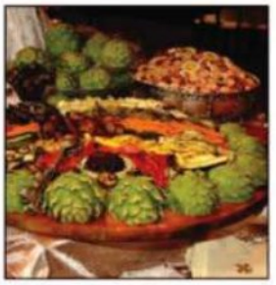

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Whimsical Wares

SCAD designers put fun spin on classic home accessories, page 48

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HAYSLIP

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The queen bees watch over their new hive. From left: Brandi Barnes Shelton of Just Add Honey, Kanani Whack of Pink Butterfly, Malene Davis of Iram-Inal, and Preeti Ayyangar of Spunge

HOT SHOP

The Beehive

The new buzz on an old favorite

by **JACKSON REEVES**

BEEHIVE CO-OP, an innovative shop that won fans with its handmade apparel and accessories, shut its Brookwood doors in March. However, its high-end yet affordable DIY concept has been revived and updated as the Beehive, now in the Edgewood Retail District, just shy of Little Five.

The new Beehive has not one queen bee, but four. Malene Davis, Brandi Barnes Shelton, Preeti Ayyangar, and Kanani Whack all worked with the Co-op, and when founder Petra Geiger wanted to sell the spot, the women joined forces, bought it, tweaked it, and relocated the hive to a place with foot traffic more in line with their philosophy of green living and localism. Each of the new owners has a specialty. Shelton has a line of loose-leaf tea. Ayyangar designs organic baby blankets. Whack bakes a Magnolia-caliber buttercream cupcake line. Then there's Davis, queen of the queens. The Co-op's final manager, she launched a line of chunky necklaces made of recycled materials in 2007; her brand is now sold at more than fifty outlets nationwide.

The queens are but four of the shop's sixty-two designers, who contribute clothing, jewelry, bath and body wares, baby products, fine art, and edibles (part of a new section of the store called Handbaked). Hazel Studstill, for instance, uses discarded Plexiglas and stingray leather to accent her jewelry line. Keisha Fullerton makes trendy, lightweight, colorful dresses out of old fabric—perfect for summer. A bath and body brand, Mama, produces natural scented soaps from olive oil that are so fresh they need expiration dates. Some of these worker bees labor in the store, taking care of the separate cells matrixed across the boutique's open, square space—a pleasant alternative to the Peachtree predecessor's bowling-alley-sized layout. And because most of the designers produce locally, they can easily alter an item or create a new one based on a customer's specifications.

"It nurtures creativity in a customer that didn't think she was creative to begin with," Davis explains. To the owners, harvesting this creative customer is key. For underlying all the jargon of "upcycling" rests a simple dream of making every bee that flies through the boutique not just a shopper bee but a worker bee as well. Combining DIY classes—from sewing to soap-making—and an engaging shopping "experience," it's a honey of an idea. *1250 Caroline Street, Suite C-120, 404-350-3898, thebeehiveatl.com* ■

RIBBON: PARKER CLAYTON SMITH

STYLE FIND

Wrapped in a Sandy Springs strip mall, **NICHOLAS KNIEL**, a 650-square-foot trove, holds more than 4,000 rolls of ribbon that can embellish anything. Think a cocktail dress made of latticed velvet strips, a "leaves turning" silk sash, or a moire taffeta rose. *290 Hilderbrand Drive, Suite B-16, 404-252-8855, nicholaskniel.com*

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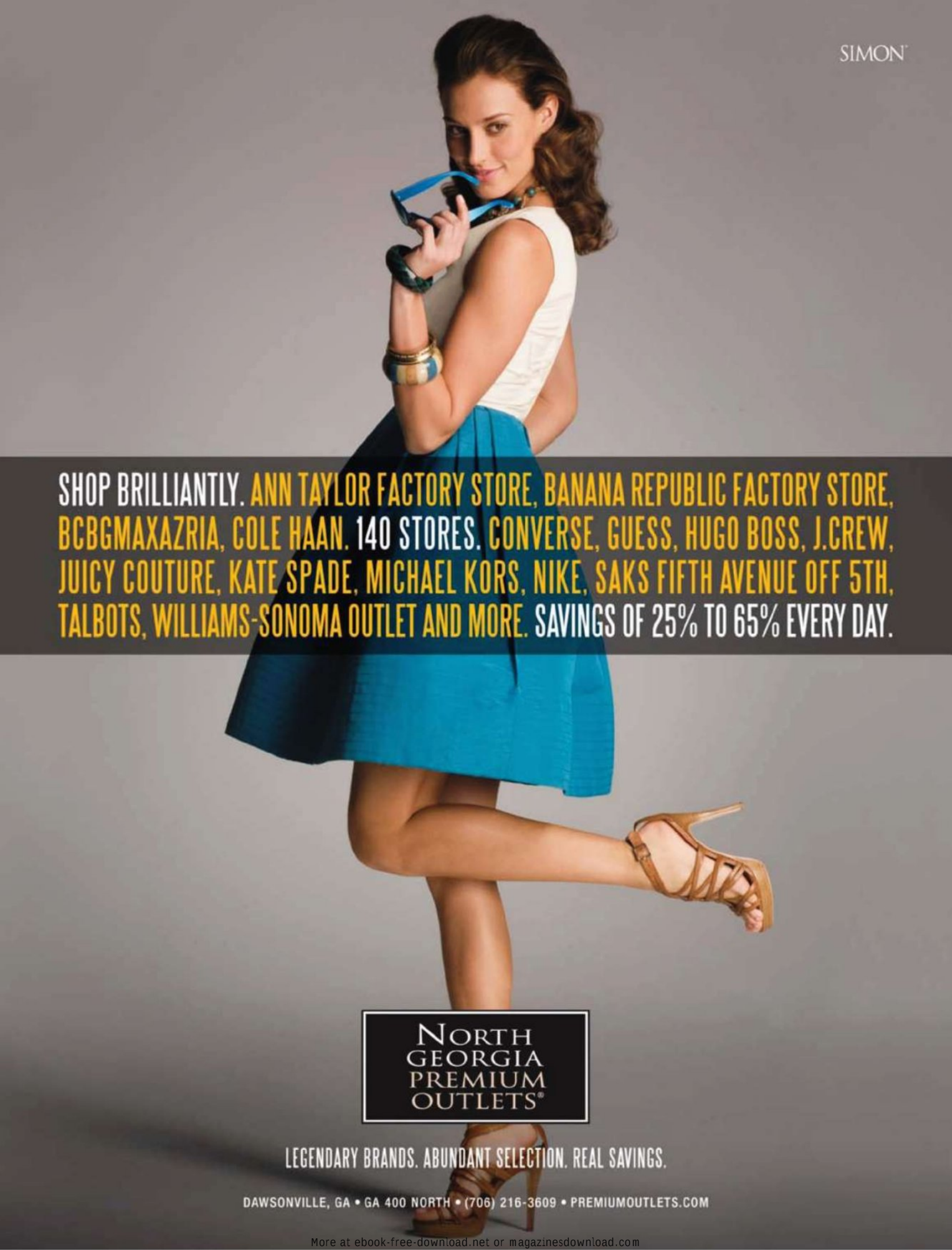

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HEAD TO TOE

Teresa Aluku

KENYA NATIVE ALUKU refuses to settle for a reproduced look, so she designs her own clothes and has a tailor in Nairobi make them for her. With a work history that includes the United Nations, this Doraville resident and American Cancer Society employee stands out from the crowd with her colorful, one-of-a-kind—and surprisingly cheap—wardrobe.

HAIR braided micro extensions

CLOTHING minidress, which Aluku uses for both the office and going out, made of batik—a dyed cotton topped with a wax—and constructed by Hassan Fabrice, Aluku's tailor, of Okapi Fashions • jacket designed by Fabrice using another outfit's extra material, which happened to match Aluku's green-and-black dress

JEWELRY custom-made zigzag silver bracelet from Maasai Market • watch from AmericasMart in Peachtree Center

SHOES gladiators by Nine West, Aluku's favorite shoe designer • "I love heels—the higher, the better—and I just love the way the shoe cuts my leg"

ON DESIGNING HER OWN PIECES "There is no way you can make anything uniquely to you if somebody else already has it"

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BLACK GARETH COMUNE $64, Bill Hallman, 792 North Highland Avenue, 404-876-6055, billhallman.com

MILITARY SHIRTS: RYAN HAYSLIP; ALI & BIRD: CAROLINE KILGORE

NEW STYLE

Ali Howell's jewelry line, **ALI & BIRD**, gets its punch from shells, slivers of wood, and semiprecious stones, yielding a green yet elegant assortment. Fitting for a summer outfit, a necklace of light amber and azure beads from her latest collection is a seasonal gem. Sold at chic boutiques such as Tulipano and Mitzi & Romano, the pieces retail from $50 to $150. *aliandbird.com*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX MARTINEZ

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GETAWAY

Havana

JUST NINETY MILES FROM KEY WEST, Cuba remains undiscovered country to most Americans, thanks to an embargo dating back to 1963. Last year, President Obama lifted restrictions on Cuban Americans' visits. But the rest of us still need a legal excuse, whether it's professional, educational, or humanitarian. Still, thousands of Americans go every year without a license, traveling via Mexico or Canada. Technically, they risk six-figure fines. We visited earlier this year, and here's what we found.
—CHARLES BETHEA

DO

Wander CALLE OBISPO, a popular walkway in Old Havana, and order a mojito at cafe LA DICHOSA. It's a block from the capitol and less touristy than Hemingway's BODEGUITA DEL MEDIO (labodeguita.com), where the daiquiri was invented. Hail a pre-embargo '57 Chevy convertible taxi for a 30-minute ride to PLAYA SANTA MARIA, where beach chairs and cold drinks cost a few pesos. For a small sum, the cabbie will wait and escort you back to Havana in time for a midafternoon INDUSTRIALES (Cuba's Yankees) game. Visit the MUSEO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN, where Fidel's version of history is displayed in an old presidential palace, then stop by the PARTAGAS cigar factory—the oldest in Cuba. Buy a Cohiba and smoke it along EL MALECÓN, a wide walkway where Havanans of all ages gaze toward Miami.

STAY

The 80-year-old HOTEL NACIONAL (hotelnacionalde-cuba.com) overlooks Havana Bay and El Malecón and boasts a breezy 19th-century veranda for smoking the hotel's selection of Churchill and Lusitanias cigars—as Buster Keaton, Errol Flynn, and Lucky Luciano did before the revolution. The hotel is luxurious but also somewhat insulated from everyday Cuban life. Closer to the heart of town is the Spanish Colonial HOTEL SEVILLA (hotelsevilla-cuba.com) along the vibrant Paseo del Prado promenade. It's cheaper than Hotel Nacional and offers a stunning rooftop bar, where Graham Greene drank rum and penned *Our Man in Havana*. Have a few sniffs of the Havana Club 15 Year, then, if you're too soused to walk, grab a pedicab for a slow ride around the crumbling colonial splendor of Old Havana at night.

EAT

Many of the ingredients Miamians use to cook really good Cuban food simply aren't available, and much of the seafood catch that's not taken to touristy restaurants is left to rot on the docks. But there are exceptions. CAJITAS (meaning "little box")—sold on the sly out of homes—are full of rice, black beans, salad, plantains, and a sliver of pork and cost about a dollar. Restaurants in Havana are a gamble, but piano bar LA ROCA serves moderately priced seafood and chicken ($50 for three entrees and a bottle of wine), and nearby LA TORRE offers overpriced but delicious American entrees on the 33rd floor of a hotel. Dessert? Head back to Calle Obispo for 25-cent strawberry ice cream sold through a window by an old Cuban woman at a little shop called LA COPELIA.

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In Nam Phuong's sparely elegant dining room, customers share specialties such as (this page) Ba Vi, or Three Delights, with sugarcane shrimp, grilled pork, and beef grilled in la lot leaves; (opposite page) lotus root salad with shrimp; and banh xeo, an eggless crepe stuffed with meats and veggies.

REVIEW

Nam Phuong

Sophisticated specialties distinguish this Vietnamese newcomer from the competition

by **BILL ADDISON**

I SAT IN THE FOYER of Nam Phuong in Norcross, hunched over my iPhone and madly Googling the names of Vietnamese dishes I'd never heard of before. On the restaurant's back wall, a glowing white screen broadcast the restaurant's daily specials. The program running the projection rhythmically underlined the words over and over again—the PowerPoint equivalent of a broken record. The dishes were listed only in Vietnamese.

Over the years, I've developed a paranoia specific to food critics: When I'm in any type of Asian restaurant and find menu items that aren't translated into English, I'm convinced that they represent the zenith of the kitchen's talent and am certain that if I don't somehow decipher these specials and persuade a sometimes-reluctant waitstaff to serve them to me, I'll have missed the truest, most indigenous aspects of the restaurant's cuisine and culture.

We tested my compulsive theory on one of the special appetizers called banh tom co ngu, which I knew from my online search translated simply as "shrimp cakes." These weren't akin to crab cakes, though: Single, plump shrimp were cradled

>> For more dining, including first looks at the latest restaurants, see A-List on page 126

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER T. MARTIN

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atop nests of shredded, deep-fried sweet potato. Next to these bundles, like a forest backing up to a beach, loomed the riot of lettuce and herbs that makes Vietnamese cuisine so distinctive. For every fried morsel, there's almost always something leafy alongside. We nestled the shrimp and sweet potato in a lettuce leaf with herbs, dipped it in clear sweet-and-sour sauce, and dug in. Mmm. The combination of tingly mint and earthy sweet potato particularly delighted. (Southerners should play more with that combination.)

I felt immensely self-satisfied with my discovery until I took a good look around the sprawling room. My tablemate and I were the only non-Asians, and none of the other customers nibbled shrimp cakes. Most were instead constructing their meals from a large platter neatly arrayed with glossy proteins. "That's the Ba Vi," said our server, pointing to the menu. "Three Delights. It's our specialty." Perhaps this wasn't a restaurant that saved its best efforts for insiders after all. Our Ba Vi arrived moments later. The three delights were chao tom, shrimp paste fried and then simmered with sugarcane; nem nuong, pork strips that register as a cross between pork meatballs and light sausage; and bo nuong la lot, seasoned beef wrapped in la lot—also known as wild betel leaves and similar to grape leaves—and grilled. Fluffy clumps of vermicelli noodles and the requisite vegetables filled the remainder of the broad metal platter.

Another server dropped off a stack of plastic-looking disks. These were rice paper wrappers, the same ones used to make fresh summer rolls often stuffed with seafood or pork and julienned vegetables. We soaked the disks in a bowl of hot water until they softened, then spread them out and began composing—a tuft of noodles on the bottom, slivers of pork and a la lot roll, and finally some greenery. The crowning touch was palate-arousing sauce based on nuoc nam, the ubiquitous fish sauce in Vietnamese cooking, mixed with pineapple and mam nem, a fermented anchovy paste. The collage of flavors ricocheted differently with every mouthful.

VITAL STATISTICS **RATING** ★★☆☆
ADDRESS 5495 Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Norcross **PHONE** 770-409-8686 **WEBSITE** namphuongatlanta.com **HOURS** Sunday–Thursday 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Friday–Saturday 10 a.m.–11 p.m.

Two dishes in and I was already grateful that Nam Phuong had opened. Vietnamese cuisine is in a rut locally. The metro area offers plenty of options for well-made pho, the aromatic beef soup, and Buford Highway houses several worthwhile stops for banh mi, the sandwich of meats, pâtés, and vegetables stuffed into baguettes. Wonderful though these iconic dishes may be, they've pigeonholed Vietnamese food in Atlanta. There's a kaleidoscope of other sophisticated dishes worth exploring—rice noodle dishes, stews, seafood and meats cooked in clay pots, boldly seasoned salads. Only a few other places delve into these realms, including first-rate Nam (owned by Alex and Chris Kinjo of the MF Sushi restaurants) and two locations of Com Vietnamese Grill, which don't have the finesse they once did.

Owner and executive chef Tieng Nguyen surely noticed the lack when she launched the Norcross restaurant—her first Nam Phuong outside Philadelphia—last August. Nguyen had three successful restaurants in Philly, sold two a few years back, and moved to Atlanta with her family to focus on her new venture in Oakbrook Square Shopping Center off Jimmy Carter Boulevard. Nearly a year into its inception, this affordable restaurant (most entrees cost under ten dollars) is an obvious hit with the Vietnamese community, and I've recently noticed more non-Asians

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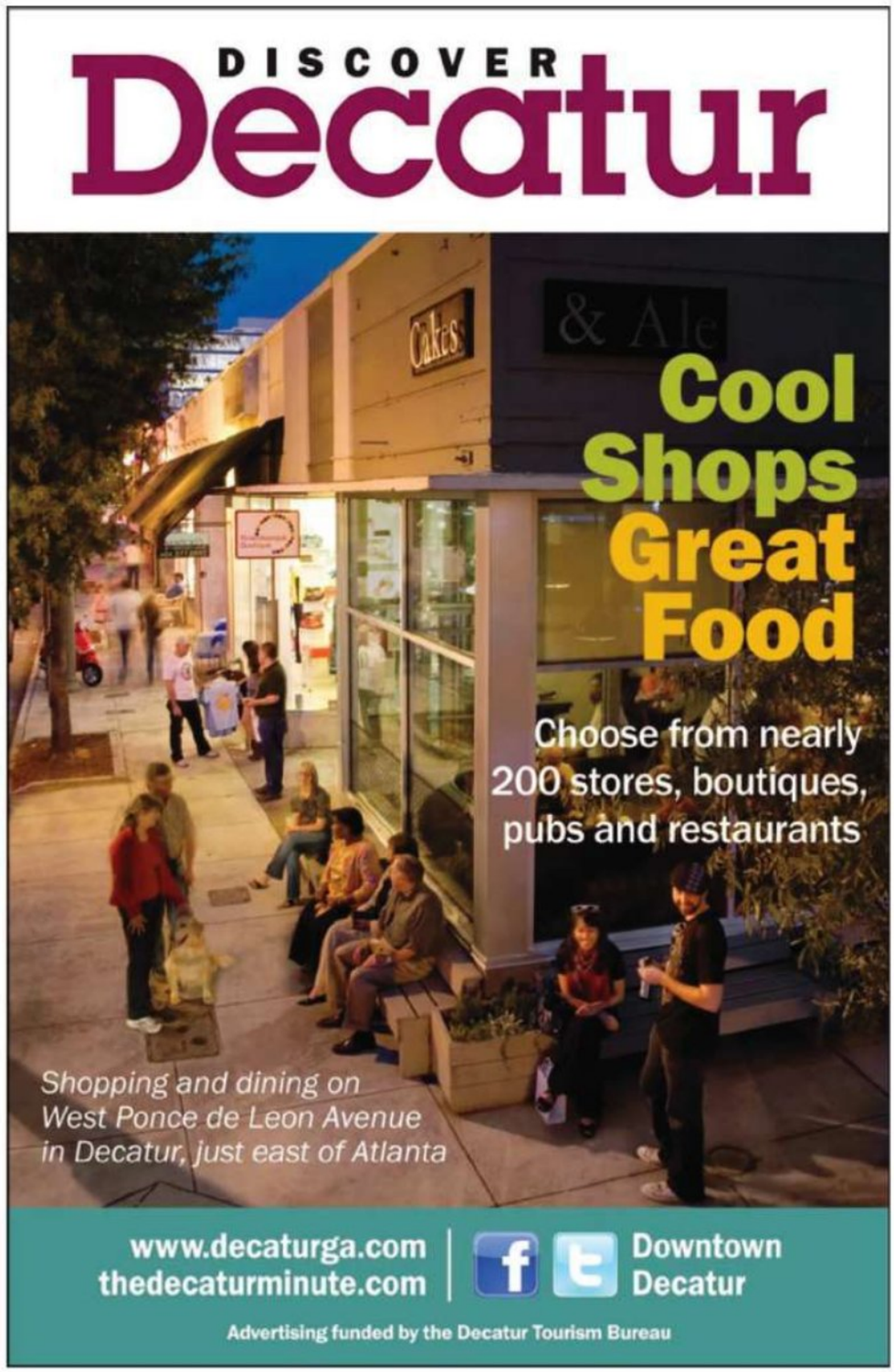
delving into the restaurant's exotic vistas.

Summer is the ideal time to chomp your way through Nam Phuong's salad list. Two classics—juicy lotus root salad with shrimp, and papaya salad with sheer, chewy snippets of beef jerky—revive the taste buds with their stunning freshness, but the duck salad reigns as my current darling among these choices. Slightly warm slices of duck mingle among shredded cabbage, carrots, banana blossoms, herbs, and lettuce, all tossed in ginger-infused dressing. This is all sharing food, of course, and the duck salad paired with banh xeo—a crisp, eggless crepe enfolded with pork, shrimp, and vegetables—is one of the most satisfying warm-weather lunches I can imagine.

When the days grow shorter, venture into the menu's more warming options. Beef stew, steeped in an anise-scented broth reminiscent of pho, demonstrates France's influence on Vietnam's cuisine. And I'm fascinated by Nam Phuong's version of congee, the rice porridge more typically found (in our country, anyway) in Chinese restaurants. Versions of congee proliferate all along the coastal, rice growing areas of Southeast Asia, and this one is thinner than most Chinese versions I've tried but heartier in proteins. Fish congee, which I like to spike with soy sauce and chili oil, will dispel any January chill.

Speaking of Chinese cooking, there's a fair amount of it slipped into the mondo menu. Dishes are never specifically identified as such, but if you come across a description that reads "chicken sauteed with black bean sauce," you aren't getting your Asian cuisines muddled. It's Chinese. And on the whole, the Vietnamese offerings taste more finely tuned.

Pho is also on the menu, but not many customers seem to order it. Noodle soup isn't the restaurant's strong point, anyway. I'm heartened that patrons gravitate toward Nguyen's nonconforming specialties. Maybe other Vietnamese chefs and restaurateurs will observe this success and decide to branch out into underexplored culinary territories themselves. ■



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CULINARY CHARACTER

The French Paradox

Our columnist speaks her Parisian mind on local Gallic gastronomy

by **CHRISTIANE LAUTERBACH**

FRENCH CARTOON MASTER JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ, whose big-nosed, slightly bewildered characters often appear on the cover of the *New Yorker*, once drew two old men wearing berets and riding rickety bicycles with string bags of identical long baguettes hanging from the crossbars. I remember that each man sported a little mustache and a limp cigarette dangling from a mouth set in a sour expression. The absurd caption—"We are becoming more and more American every day"—made me laugh out loud.

For all the media reports about the French adopting American culture, I postulate that it is the Americans who have become more like the French in their obsession with handcrafted food and slow cooking and their newfound love for off-cut meats. Thirty-five years ago, as a new arrival, I missed everything about my country: the bread, the cheese, the croissants, the bottled mineral water, the charcuterie, the plump chickens cooked in red wine, the espresso, the dark chocolate. Yes, those crazy Americans had steaks of shocking size and tenderness, but I preferred the chewy, more flavorful grass-fed beef I had grown up with. Every one of those items is now available to me in our metropolitan area.

By contrast, the French restaurants I encountered in Atlanta three decades ago did little to soothe my nostalgia. I cried over the Continental disappointments at Chateau Fleur de Lis, then the supposed leader in local French cuisine, and I discovered Petite Auberge to be essentially German. Strangely enough, the places where I felt most at home were the few Vietnamese holes-in-the-wall, which reminded me of the backstreets of Paris.

I threw myself into my new surroundings and learned all there was to know about fried chicken, Brunswick stew, pimento cheese, deviled eggs, and Southern cakes. All were far better than the approximations of French cuisine my fellow Atlantans seemed taken with.

France has its own culinary Mason-Dixon Line: butter to the north, olive oil to the south. When cute little bistros such as Anis started opening in Atlanta in the early 1980s, I liked them well enough, but their sunny allegiance to Provence meant as little to me as the cooking of Alabama does to a born New Yorker. I kept giving French restaurants the cold shoulder. Jean Banchet threatened to throw me out of Ciboulette, his benchmark nineties restaurant, and many other chefs cried foul.

I fell in love with Brasserie Le Coze the day it opened in Lenox Square. The food, the decor, and the service felt fiercely, authentically French to me. Reincarnated Downtown as FAB and still run as a first-class establishment by the unflappable Fabrice Vergez, the restaurant feels more French to me than all of Atlanta's Gallic eateries put together: Au Pied de Cochon in the InterContinental hotel is too much like a theme park, and an empty one at that. Bistro Niko is too Buckhead. Joël has been ruined by ruthless downsizing (chef Cyrille Holota hits some high notes, but the menu panders more and more to undemanding corporate customers). Amuse in Midtown is too much of a hybrid. Cafe Alsace in Decatur doesn't make good Alsatian choucroute. La Petite Maison on Roswell Road is riddled with cliches. And although I adore its modest version of cuisine grandmère and its homemade desserts, Brookhaven's Au Rendez-Vous has never looked anything but flimsy and junky in a uniquely American way.

The good news is that I no longer have to turn to French restaurants when I want steak frites, beautifully cooked sweetbreads, homemade rillettes and pâté de campagne, crusty bread and sweet butter with fleur de sel, raw-milk cheeses served at room temperature, and fruit desserts with more flavor than sugar. The upper echelon of American chefs is all over such things.

Who knows whether other people read BLT Steak in the W Atlanta–Downtown as a French restaurant, but I certainly do. The kitchen is starting to cut a few corners, as evidenced by its much-reduced complimentary charcuterie board, but after a special such as snails sauteed with fresh peas and mint and a blood-red hanger steak with lush sauce béarnaise, I want to hug chef Jean-Luc Mongodin, who runs the local show for New York–based chef-owner Laurent Tourondel. Despite its unfamiliar temperature, the

FAB Downtown (this page) has that certain French je ne sais quoi; Christine and Jean-Marc Métairie (opposite), who run Atmosphère near Ansley, serve dishes such as trout Amandine.

FAB: LAUREN RUBINSTEIN

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ATMOSPHÈRE; JOHN AUTRY AND CHARLOTTE FEKETE

baked chocolate mousse is a divine taste of Paris, and the magnificent popovers (not really a French dish!) call my name.

Sometimes, though, I want to dine in a French context. I need someone who says "Bonjour" to me at the door and pours me a little drop (une petite goutte) of Calvados at the end of the meal. The highest compliment I can pay to Atmosphère near Ansley is that it is always correct. The soups are never too rich. The salads are tossed with tenderness. I usually eat charcuterie or some snails in garlic butter and a steak. Christine and Jean-Marc Métairie, the least snobby French couple you'll ever meet, run the restaurant as if it were an extension of their home. I would never think of their terrace as merely a deck, and I like to dine under a parasol.

Le Triskell, which opened a year ago in the bottom of a small high-rise, makes crêpes au jambon that remind me of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris's Latin Quarter. And while I have always relied on Vietnamese bakeries for petits pâtés chauds (a savory pastry stuffed with ground pork), I was floored to find homemade yogurt that tasted exactly like its French counterpart (not thick and chalky like most available here) in the cooler of the new Viet Tofu on Jimmy Carter Boulevard. Candied orange peels dipped in chocolate from Maison Robert and petits fours at Douceur de France in Marietta flood me with happy memories. Couscous night (every other Saturday) at Downtown's Social is the newest way I see France insinuating itself into Atlanta. Owner Rheda "Ray" Chikhaoui, a young Frenchman of Tunisian background, has emerged as a champion of a dish that France inherited from its former North African colonies.

There are still a few things I pine for: a true French boudin noir made with pork blood, the indelicate gut sausage known as andouillette, and veal kidneys à la moutarde. But with more and more Atlanta gourmands trying to outdo the French, we may all be eating these delicacies soon. ■

Christiane's Favorite French Spots

ATMOSPHÈRE
1620 Piedmont Avenue, 678-702-1620, atmosphere-bistro.com

AU RENDEZ-VOUS
1328 Windsor Parkway, 404-303-1968

BLT STEAK
W Atlanta–Downtown, 45 Ivan Allen Jr. Boulevard, 404-577-7601, bltsteak.com

DOUCEUR DE FRANCE
367 Glover Street, Marietta, 770-425-5050, douceurdefrance.com

FRENCH AMERICAN BRASSERIE (FAB)
30 Ivan Allen Jr. Boulevard, 404-266-1440, fabatlanta.com

LE TRISKELL FRENCH CREPERIE
3833 Roswell Road, 404-814-8208

MAISON ROBERT
5256 Peachtree Road, Chamblee, 770-454-6442, maisonrobert-chocolates.com

SOCIAL
12 West Peachtree Place, 404-525-2246, socialintown.com

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OUTDOOR RETREAT

Hopes' Folly

A backyard summer house provides respite

by **LISA MOWRY**

KRISTINE AND JOE HOPE'S SUMMER HOUSE is not at the lake, it's in their backyard. Architects Rick Spitzmiller and Robert Norris designed the freestanding structure after giving the Hopes' house an exterior face-lift. "It's all about the destination, a way to pull people into the garden," explains Spitzmiller. "Ninety-nine percent of people might build a screened porch off the back of their house instead, but they would be missing something. It's not quite the same."

"When we bought our house twenty-six years ago, it was just about the ugliest house on the street, but the prettiest lot," Kristine recalls. Their cozy backyard retreat was modeled after eighteenth-century "follies," whimsical structures popular in French and English gardens. The architects originally proposed it as a pool house, but the Hopes nixed the pool and opted for a water feature instead—a narrow channel called a rill that leads to a gurgling fountain. Set on an axis with the main house, the summer house lures visitors through the Hopes' one-acre-plus property.

The charming, understated facade—with its bell-cast eaves, double doors, and fieldstone accents—looks as if it were plucked from an English garden. By contrast, the interior is deceptively large, with a semi-octagonal wall that projects into the woods and offers an impressive view. Stone floors provide durability, vaulted ceilings enhance the sense of spaciousness, and screens keep out bugs. Although only 500 square feet, the little house is an ideal place to host a luncheon, watch a football game with the Hopes' college-age children, or build a fire in the massive stone fireplace.

Joe often spends the day gardening, then starts a fire for evening ambience, reports his wife. "Even though it's called a summer house, we definitely use it year-round," says Kristine. "It is on the highest part of our property, up in the trees. It feels like you're in the mountains." ■

RESOURCES

ARCHITECTURE by Spitzmiller & Norris, spitzmillerandnorris.com **LANDSCAPE** by E. Graham Pittman & Associates, egpittman.com

LOCAL FIND

Twisted Toile

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FANS of Working Class Studio, the product development venture run by students, faculty, and alumni of the Savannah College of Art and Design. But this summer's new lines are our favorites yet. The Savannah Toile collection of kitchen linens and pillows is an updated take on the traditional fabric pattern, with scenes ranging from Spanish moss–draped oaks to mohawked bikers—available in the unconventional colors of burnt scarlet, gecko, mustard, and teal. Mix the toile with two other pillow collections in bold graphic designs inspired by Mediterranean tiles and natural flora and fauna. The owl pillows make us nostalgic for the 1970s. Also new are several lighthearted stationery lines with fun riffs on advertising and pop culture motifs. These designs join other innovative products such as the "Puffy" stuffed fabric frames, colorful melamine dishware, and stretchable rubber wall clocks. ***Check out workingclassstudio.com to find Atlanta retailers and view products.*** **—BETSY RILEY**

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HAYSLIP

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL TRESSLER

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DIY PROJECT

Lights, Camera, Crash

The DIY Network's *House Crashers* build a dream kitchen in Ormewood

by **AMANDA HECKERT**

KNEES BENT, ORMEWOOD RESIDENT DAN BUSH cocks his sledgehammer like Casey at the bat. He and a few similarly armed friends eye their target: an eighty-year-old wall separating the kitchen from a pantry in the home Bush shares with his wife, Caroline.

"Wait on the camera," says Josh Temple, licensed contractor and host of the DIY Network's *House Crashers*. "Then I'm going to let you guys demo the f--k out of this."

That word won't make it on air, but the next moment will: Bush and company let loose on the wall like mad, hipster woodsmen, hacking it to bits as plaster settles like pollen on the dust-masked crew crowding the cramped space.

Ever since the Bushes moved into the slate-gray bungalow four years ago, "we've wanted to take a sledgehammer to the kitchen," says Dan. Until now, the usually resourceful couple hadn't tackled the dated (and today, they discover via Caroline's shrieks, dead-rat-concealing) space.

The Bushes were approached by Temple while browsing at the Dump (see below). The *Crashers* crew was on the lookout there for homeowners in need of help with a project, and the Bushes—unlike several other Dump customers that day—said yes immediately. But while they're used to cameras (he's a filmmaker who codirected 2007 Sundance success *The Signal*; she's a wardrobe and prop stylist), they weren't quite prepared for the gaggle of carpenters and designers, craftsmen and cameramen that arrived honking at the foot of their lawn this morning.

Host Josh Temple, left, and the Bushes in their renovated kitchen. Episode airs July 5 at 9 p.m. during DIY's Crash Week.

"I thought there would be more talking about what we would be doing, but no," says Caroline as she waits for the dust to settle amid the tools and cords and appliances in the backyard. "It's action!"

And it has to be. *House Crashers*—a newish spin-off of the Knoxville-based DIY Network's already-successful *Yard Crashers* series—promises to conduct its duckling-to-swanathon in just three days. Each episode begins with an in-store "ambush" of unsuspecting shoppers. For the Atlanta project, local design/build company Clear Sky Homes kept everyone on task, and Lawrenceville's Burns Century Interior Design created the "rustic modern" aesthetic desired by the couple. Stainless steel Whirlpool appliances, for instance, contrast with a large island in reclaimed barn wood by Southern Heritage Woodworks of Sylvester, Georgia. Textures range from slick, eco-friendly aggregate countertops to an industrial-looking metal ceiling.

But the best part? "The dishwasher," says Caroline without hesitation. "I don't have to do dishes anymore!" ■

HOUSE CRASHERS: DIY NETWORK; THE DUMP: CAROLINE KILGORE

BUDGET FRIENDLY

Dump Diving

NEW FURNITURE WAREHOUSE OFFERS STEEP DISCOUNTS ON NAME BRANDS

YOU MAY HAVE SEEN THE BILLBOARDS. "Atlanta Gets Dumped," they screamed in fat yellow letters. The Dump is actually a new, 100,000-square-foot-plus furniture store in the old Home Depot building off Sidney Marcus Boulevard. Despite its trashy name, the megastore is an attractive space lit by clever oversized drum shades in cheerful prints and packed with a sea of new merchandise. Overstocks, floor models, and closeouts by makers such as Bernhardt, Old Hickory, and Regency House sell here for as much as 70 percent off retail. Thankfully, the legions of eager salespeople do not use a high-pressure approach, so you won't feel stalked. Most furniture is traditional or transitional, with a smattering of modern, country, and Asian styles. Furniture delivery is only $85 within a seventy-five-mile radius, no matter the quantity. The store, part of a Virginia-based chain, is open only on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. *815 Sidney Marcus Boulevard, 404-442-1900, thedump.com* —BETSY RILEY

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The combo plate at Sam's BBQ1 (page 60)

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BBQ 2010

ATLANTA MAGAZINE BBQ 2010

Edited by
BILL ADDISON

Photographs by
JAMEY GUY, JOSH MEISTER,
and **CAROLINE KILGORE**

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMEY GUY

First things first: Where does Georgia fit into the Southern barbecue spectrum?

By JIM AUCHMUTEY

One of my family's fondest keepsakes is a July 1954 copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* that pictures my grandfather tending the pits at the Euharlee Farmers Club barbecue in Bartow County. It's part of a five-page spread titled "Dixie's Most-Disputed Dish." I never realized how apt that headline was until I reread the article recently and noticed that the writer declared Georgia "the home of barbecue."

We'll pause here while North Carolinians spit.

I can't imagine anyone making such a claim today. Georgia—much less Atlanta—is not known as a barbecue hotbed in the way Memphis, Kansas City, Texas, and the Carolinas are. I've even heard people say that Birmingham is a better barbecue town than Atlanta, and that smarts. "Georgia is not a big, red star on the barbecue map," says the Atlanta History Center's Don Rooney, a Marietta native who has spent months researching barbecue nationwide for an upcoming exhibition. "Is that image unfair? Probably, because there's some damn good barbecue here. I've eaten at places around Atlanta that are every bit as good as Memphis or Kansas City." No question, there's some fine swine in North Georgia. In fact, you could argue that our city is undergoing something of a barbecue renaissance. By my count, there are at least 300 barbecue places in metro Atlanta now, and many of the better ones have opened in the past decade.

So why don't we have more of a reputation in the meat-smoking arts? It's probably because we're hard to peg. Most of the areas that are famous for barbecue have distinctive styles. North Carolina is known for whole hogs served with fiery vinegar sauce, or finely chopped pork with hushpuppies on the side. Memphis has dry ribs and sandwiches stuffed with pork and slaw. Texans rightfully brag on their sausage and brisket. Kansas City has that sweet tomato

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Brunswick stew at Fresh Air Bar-B-Que

slather, while South Carolina indulges its secessionist tendencies with a rebellious mustard sauce. Compared to the others, Georgia doesn't bring a trademark to the table. If anything, our indigenous barbecue resembles what you find in the Carolina Piedmont, where many of the pioneers of up-country Georgia came from. Think of the chopped pork and thin tomato-vinegar sauce at Fresh Air near Jackson, one of the state's oldest barbecue joints. The state does have a long, proud barbecue history, but much of it has to do with big communal feeds: church gatherings, political rallies, the Twelve Oaks barbecue in *Gone with the Wind*. I suspect those are what the *Saturday Evening Post* writer had in mind when he awarded us supremacy.

Georgia lays claim to one barbecue specialty, but even that is in dispute. Folks on the coast say Brunswick stew originated in the town of that name, while the good citizens of Brunswick County, Virginia, maintain that they were stirring pots seventy years earlier. The dish started as a hunters' stew in frontier days using whatever game and critters were available. Today we use domesticated meats: Virginia's is based on chicken; Georgia's contains pork, tomatoes, corn, cider vinegar—and everything else is debatable.

Brunswick stew does seem to be a much larger presence in Georgia. Ask Atlantans their favorite barbecue place and many are likely to name Harold's—not so much for the pig meat but for the exemplary stew and cracklin' cornbread. Come to think of it, I don't have any of my grandfather's barbecue recipes, but I do have his instructions for Brunswick stew, which he inherited from his father and passed down to my father.

You could argue that Atlanta is undergoing a barbecue renaissance. So why don't we have more of a reputation in the smoking arts? It's probably because we're hard to peg.

I wondered what others thought about Georgia's barbecue identity, so I ran the question by a few locals known for their pit wisdom. Dorothy Clements, whose family ran the dear, departed Auburn Avenue Rib Shack, considered the matter and gave a twofold answer. "To me, Georgia barbecue is ribs on the bone. But I know a lot of whites like chopped pork." Sam Huff, who made his reputation on the cook-off circuit and now runs Sam's BBQ1 in East Cobb, said he borrowed from several states to meld his style. "What's Georgia barbecue? I cooked it, I've lived in Georgia all my life, so that's Georgia barbecue."

David Roberts, who grew up with church barbecues in DeKalb County and recently opened Community Q BBQ in Decatur, admitted that the riddle of our barbecue DNA has been bugging him lately: "If someone came up to my counter and asked for authentic Georgia barbecue, I'd just get flustered." Instead, Roberts turned the question on his customers. One day recently, he asked whether they thought Georgia has a particular barbecue style. Of the 108 people who responded, 80 percent said no. One of them replied, "Hell, no!" and went on to blame General Sherman for incinerating all traces of Southern culture in Atlanta. Maybe he was the devil who brought parboiled ribs.

So it's agreed: Atlanta and Georgia are chameleons of 'cue. Does it matter? At least one barbecue fan doesn't think so; he believes our lack of identity could even be a marketing tool. "We're the crossroads of the South and the crossroads of barbecue," says Bob Herndon, founder of the Atlanta BBQ Club and promoter of the annual Atlanta BBQ Festival. "Other cities can sell their distinctive style. We can sell the fact that we have it all."

There you have it, Atlanta's latest slogan: The Crossroads of Barbecue.

›*Jim Auchmutey, a former longtime feature writer for the* Atlanta Journal-Constitution, *is working on an illustrated history of barbecue.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMEY GUY

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Quest for the 'cue

58 BBQ joints including our Top 5

By **BILL ADDISON**

FULTON COUNTY

Bucc's Barbecue

The earnest staffers at Bucc's, which opened earlier this year, will give you the rundown straightaway: They don't serve pork. They offer four sauces: mild, medium, hot (with a true lingering heat), and sweet peach (which stays just shy of cloying). Order collards—robust with smoked turkey—and complexly seasoned potato salad with your strapping beef ribs. This is mainly a drive-thru operation; two tables on the patio are the only seating available. *313 Boulevard, 404-736-6197*

'Cue Barbecue

Those incredulous that a midscale rendition of a barbecue joint can produce soul-satisfying meats should shovel their forks into a pile of 'Cue's supple smoked pork. The restaurant covers all the barbecue basics (choose pork over beef) but adds in a few creative options that complement the essentials. An appetizer of sliced homemade sausages comes with amazing jalapeño pickles that somehow don't make your mouth feel like a firestorm. And it was here that I discovered how well Smuttynose Old Brown Dog Ale pairs with barbecue. Expect a short wait on weekend evenings: 'Cue's middle-of-the-road approach makes it a popular family dining spot. *13700 Highway 9, Milton, 770-667-0089, cuebarbecue.com*

D.B.A. Barbecue

D.B.A. (which stands for "Doing Business As," typically a placeholder moniker) opened last year serving tepid, smokeless barbecue. Owner Matt Coggin quickly wised up, made some crucial changes in the kitchen, and began earning fans in the Virginia-Highland community. The food is much improved. The baby back ribs can have an almost bitter char, but the spareribs are crusty and chewy in all the right ways. Pulled pork also included some barky pieces that enhanced the texture. Vegetarians should make a meal of well-executed sides rather than the undersmoked tofu. Great patio. *1190 North Highland Avenue, 404-249-5000, dbabarbecue.com*

Daddy D'z

Chicago native Ron Newman's Grant Park dive is one of the most polarizing rib shacks in town. Some swear by the meats smoked over hickory and oak. I've eaten here several times over the years, and although the dim, funky digs and the ever-changing crowd have classic barbecue joint appeal, I find the food frustratingly inconsistent. You never know which of the meats will be freshest and which will taste over the hill, though ribs and pulled pork are typically the most prudent choices. Likewise, the signature "que wraps" can come across either as fun, pork-stuffed bread sticks or—on an off day—as greasy, over-the-hill wontons. *264 Memorial Drive, 404-222-0206, daddydz.com*

Dreamland Bar-B-Que

Having visited the original Dreamland in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, years ago, I can attest that the ribs at this outpost aren't made with the same craft. That said, the ribs are shot through with hickory smoke and have the correct pink tinge. The chicken tastes more grilled than smoked, but a heavy hand with the spices gives the skin some frisky flavor. Any health benefits from ordering green beans are subverted by the liberal inclusion of chopped sausage link. *10730 Alpharetta Highway, Roswell, 678-352-7999, dreamlandbbq.com*

Fat Matt's Rib Shack

Few locals must have shown surprise when George Clooney answered "Fat Matt's" after Vera Farmiga asked his character for Atlanta barbecue guidance in *Up in the Air*. The uncitified atmosphere (with blues playing nightly) and the straightforward menu with zero gourmet trappings have earned this twenty-year-old institution national attention—and all the debate that accompanies such notice. I'll come here if I want nothing more than a plate of ribs, which arrive blackened, moderately caramelized, modestly smoky, and altogether satisfying. The rest of the menu doesn't much impress, least of all the oversauced pulled pork sandwich. *1811 Piedmont Avenue, 404-607-1622, fatmattsribshack.com*

Fox Bros. Bar-B-Q

Among the more recently opened barbecue contenders, none has gained more

BBQ FEEDBACK

In order to cover nearly sixty barbecue restaurants, I ate at each joint only once during this search. Barbecue, by virtue of its painstaking cooking process, is a fleeting pleasure, and experiences can vary greatly. Did I hit your favorite on a bad day or enjoy a joint that has disappointed you? Or did I miss your most cherished barbecue pit stop altogether? Let me know at baddison@atlantamag.emmis.com, or visit the dining section of atlantamagazine.com.

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wild popularity than Fox Bros. Jonathan and Justin Fox took over the former location of Asada in the summer of 2007, and the restaurant's parking lot has been one continuous logjam since. Being Texas natives, the brothers naturally excel at beef: Their sliced brisket has the proper nubbly texture achieved from slow cooking, and their tender on-the-bone short rib, sold Thursdays and Saturdays as a special, is the best iteration of that Flintstonian indulgence in the city. I'm not as fond of the pork, which is often lifeless and overcooked, but I do like their wackier creations such as the "Tomminator" (Tater Tots pummeled with Brunswick stew and melted cheese) and the gloppy "burger" with beef brisket and pimento cheese. *1238 DeKalb Avenue, 404-577-4030, foxbrosbbq.com*

Go to atlantamagazine.com for **BBQ EXTRAS**, including an online road map, video footage of our Top 5, and more!

Hambones BBQ

Hambones' dining room is vast for an independent barbecue restaurant—and at lunch it fills to capacity with a bustling, racially diverse crowd. It's easy to see why: Astutely cooked barbecue comes whizzing out of the kitchen shortly after you order at the counter. Hunky spareribs don't possess much char, but the meat is pink and hickory-scented to the bone. Satisfying bits of ebony bark add extra smoky dimension to the chopped pork. Golden fries may arrive after the rest of the food, but their crisp texture and pure potato flavor reward your patience. *811 Virginia Avenue, Hapeville, 404-767-0888, hambones-bbq.com*

Harold's Barbecue

Harold's has been a revered name in Atlanta barbecue circles since 1947. The dry, bland pork I encountered on a recent visit did not live up to the restaurant's status, however. It stays on the radar nonetheless for the speedy service and the two things it does incredibly well: zesty Brunswick stew and its famous cracklin' cornbread. *171 McDonough Boulevard, 404-627-9268*

KC Pit BBQ

The Kansas City–style barbecue (dry-rubbed meats with thick, tangy sauce) I hoped to find, given the restaurant's name, didn't appear at a Sunday lunch. Pulled pork had a cottony texture, and the pork ribs tasted reheated. A $17 combo plate was one of the most expensive I encountered on this search. Lamb ribs, a unique offering, proved the one highlight. This is a swankier take on a barbecue joint, featuring live jazz four nights a week in a room the size of a modest auditorium. *6317 Roswell Road, Sandy Springs, 404-459-6497, kcpitbbq.com*

Pig-n-Chik

This advice applies to most barbecue restaurants but especially to Pig-n-Chik: Go early. It can mean the difference between meats that look and taste vibrant versus barbecue that's obviously losing its mojo. (Few foods demand more immediate consumption than barbecue.) Ribs here are a tad too fatty for my taste; I prefer the pulled pork, preferably in a sandwich piled—upon request—with coleslaw. Props for the mustard and vinegar sauces, which both avoid the too-sweet trap. Staffers show major hustle when the lunch crowds descend. *4920 Roswell Road, 404-255-6368, and other locations, pignchik.net*

WHO DOES IT BEST?

BRUNSWICK STEW
Fresh Air Bar-B-Que

Most Brunswick stew variations taste like either diluted barbecue sauce or smoky vegetable soup. The version at Jackson's Fresh Air—rich, balanced, and subtly creamy with potato—is a revelation worth the drive to discover.

Pit Boss BBQ

This concrete block and plywood shack must surely suffer some tough competition from always-busy Hambones, which previously occupied this building and relocated just up the street. But Pit Boss holds its own with juicy, vinegar-laced pulled pork; decent mac and cheese; and pleasantly dusky collard greens. The friendly counter staff would make a regular of me if I lived in Hapeville, but I'd quickly learn to skip the outsourced cakes. *856 Virginia Avenue, Hapeville, 404-768-0036*

Rolling Bones

Rolling Bones surprised Downtown office workers and residents when it opened in 2003. Its toothpaste-white exterior, renovated from a modernist gas station, belied the soulfulness of the barbecue cooked on a streamlined system inside. But the quality waned, and last year the Lush Life Group—a collective of hospitality professionals who also run the higher-end One Flew South in Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport—acquired the restaurant.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59

D.B.A. Barbecue on North Highland Avenue

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINE KILGORE

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ATLANTA MAGAZINE BBQ 2010

#1

Hickory Pig

Phil Beaubien (right) builds his own smokers and serves his barbecue masterpieces in a windowless room filled with droll bric-a-brac.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMEY GUY

Phil Beaubien, owner and pitmaster of Hickory Pig in Gainesville, looked up from his own lunch when I walked through the door. "What can I get for you?" he asked. I studied the longish list of meats posted on the wall near the kitchen. "What's freshest?" I asked. Beaubien smiled, amused by my question. "Well, let's just see," he said, and disappeared. I sat down and looked around. A framed print of a window hung on one wall—the only semblance of a view in the fully enclosed room. On the opposite wall, someone had scribbled a picture of a computer in red crayon. The caption underneath read: "Internet cafe coming 2009." I liked the lopsided humor of this place immediately.

Beaubien returned with a free sampler. "Try everything, and then I'll get more of what you like," he said. I picked up a spareribs. The meat, as pink as country ham, blazed with smokiness without obliterating the pork flavor. Then I bit into sumptuous pork loin, stunning beef brisket with melting fat, juicy chopped chicken—even a hunk of hickory-infused burger. Beaubien had snuck in smoked ground beef among the Brunswick stew's chicken and pork—delicious heresy! I'd had more daringly spiced ribs on my tour of local barbecue joints, but this plate of food was, collectively, the finest I'd had. Another customer noticed my expression. "Is this your first time here?" he asked. "Bless your heart."

Beaubien has run the Hickory Pig for nearly twenty years. Previously an insurance salesman, he picked up barbecuing as a hobby, built his own smokers, and initially served his masterpieces only on Saturday. (He now serves devoted regulars Tuesday through Saturday). As enticement, I could suggest picking up barbecue and homey sides as picnic food for a day trip to Lake Lanier ten miles away. But really, barbecue this sublime warrants the hour-and-ten-minute drive from Atlanta solely on its own merit. *3605 Thompson Bridge Road, Gainesville, 770-503-5235, hickorypig.com*

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Sam Huff, owner of Sam's BBQ1

Never neglect the "internal marination of the chef"

"People don't season enough . . . everything worth doing is worth overdoing"

Add white oak, hickory, or another wood to the coals

Make sure the pork has reached 185 degrees

BBQ DIY 101

SAM HUFF SUGGESTS starting the day off with a Bloody Mary. It's grilling lesson number one: Never neglect the "internal marination of the chef." Huff, who run Sam's BBQ1 on Lower Roswell Road, is in no rush to get cooking. This is a man, winner of barbecue contests around the country and the founder of Pork U, whose backyard motto is "low and slow, all night long." However, Huff's goal on this late April day, on the five acres in Kennesaw where he's lived all his life, is to teach me how to cook chicken, ribs, and pork like a pro—during daylight hours. Of all that I digested, this is what you need to know:

1 *Get good meat*: "While it's true that barbecue originated as a means of making tough cuts of meat tasty," Huff says, "I recommend starting with as good a product as you can afford." Brisket ranges from good (choice grade) to better (Certified Angus Beef), even better (fresh prime), and the best and most expensive (Wagyu). For pork shoulders, get the freshest you can find, preferably never frozen. A whole chicken from Kroger will suffice.

2 *Brine all poultry*: Use one cup of salt and one cup of sugar per gallon of water, plus whatever spices you like. Rinse the meat with this mixture. Pat dry.

3 *Boost flavor*: Marinades, rubs, bastes, mops, and injections. "People don't season enough," says Huff, who often uses a rub that includes black pepper, orange peel, coriander, fennel, paprika, allspice, celery seed, and—importantly—dry molasses and Worcestershire powder. Huff likes to inject his chicken with a cooking syringe full of melted butter, chicken broth, and orange extract. "Everything worth doing is worth overdoing," he says.

4 *Add smoke*: Wood chunks, chips, sawdust, smoking pellets, smoker boxes, foil pouches—whatever it takes to get smoke to permeate the meat. Once it's rubbed and on the smoker, meat can only absorb smoke for three to four hours at low temperatures before the pores of the meat are full. Put your meat on one side of your grill, slowly building the fire under the other side—adding white oak, hickory, or another wood to the coals. "This is best done on a Primo or Big Green Egg smoker," says Huff. These grills break into pieces, allowing you to keep the meat on one half of the grill while replenishing the fuel on the other side.

5 *Encourage moisture*: Put a pan of tasty liquid (apple juice for pork; orange juice or beer for chicken) on a separate rack beneath the meat you're smoking. This will add flavor, maintain moisture, and avoid flare-ups by allowing fat to drip into liquid instead of coals. It'll also buffer the temperature, providing a barrier between fire and meat. Try not to open the smoker much, allowing moisture and heat to escape: "If you're lookin'," says Huff, "you ain't cookin'."

6 *Cook indirectly, low and slow*: Indirect heat is what really separates guys like Sam Huff from us: We cook right over our flames, drying our meat, preventing the accumulation of flavor. The ideal smoker temperature for slow-cooking most meat is 225 degrees, reaching a safe internal meat temperature of 185. "They say there's never been a case of trichinosis in this state," Huff says. Cover the flame with a deflector plate or pizza stone so hot air circulates around the meat for as much of a day as you've got. This is also best done on a Primo or Big Green Egg, though a Weber can be jury-rigged for indirect heat with products such as the BBQ Baffle.

7 *Recognize the end*: Chicken is done when the wings move easily. Ribs are ready when the meat can be pulled off the bone without a struggle. Make sure the pork has reached 185 degrees.

8 *Fatten the story*: "The final step," says Huff, "is the most important: Lie to your friends. Tell them your barbecue comes from recipes handed down for generations and you would never reveal the secret ingredients even if tortured for days. All great barbecue has secret ingredients. Just have fun."

Learn more at Sam Huff's all-day Pork U class on July 24. Enrollment limited; $250; bbq1.net.

—CHARLES BETHEA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOE McKENDRY

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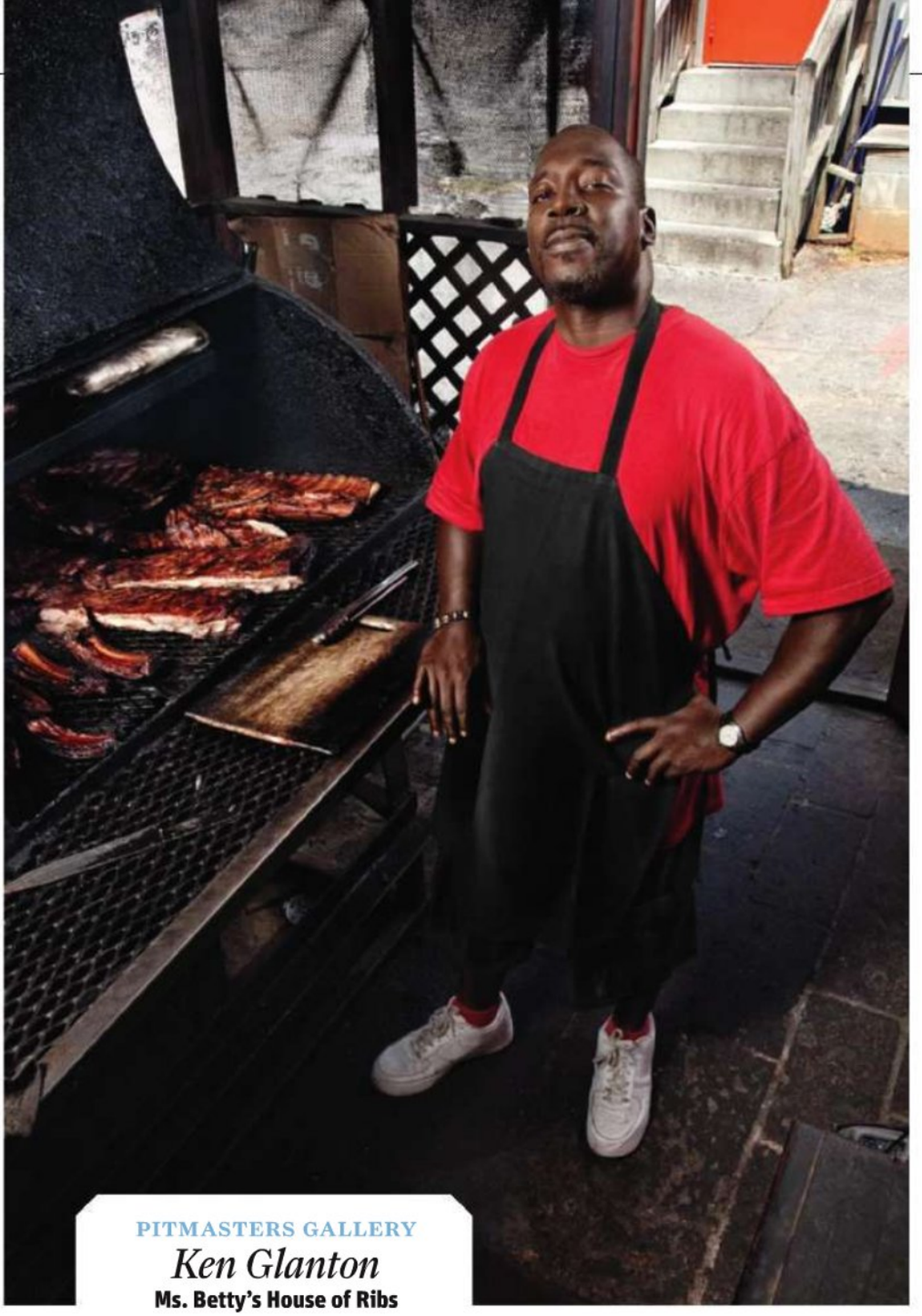
WHO DOES IT BEST?

POTATO SALAD
Rolling Bones

Never hold back on spices in potato salad; season it fearlessly. Rolling Bones' potato salad holds to that credo, with a mustardy depth boosted by one of the South's favorite ingredients: Allan Benton's bacon.



PITMASTERS GALLERY

Ken Glanton

Ms. Betty's House of Ribs

The new owners spiked the smokiness of the meats using hickory and pecan woods, and they added novel proteins such as duck and trout. In the year since the changeover, I've had meals of varying quality: The pulled pork and beef brisket can be vital and moist or listless and dry. Pink, lacquered ribs deliver more consistency, and the barbecued duck meat has a wondrously creamy texture. Ask for the sauce (hot or mild) on the side, and choose mustard greens or potato salad as accompaniments. *377 Edgewood Avenue, 404-222-2324, rollingbonesbbq.com*

Slope's BBQ

Slope's original Roswell location (the one I visited) kicked off a small chain of franchised branches around the northern metro area. Come in a carnivorous mood: Chewy-tender ribs, chopped individually and brushed with the typical tomato-based sauce, are soundly enjoyable. Not much else enthused, though. Desserts—porridgelike blackberry cobbler and a banana pudding whose ingredients hadn't yet coalesced—particularly flopped. *34 East Crossville Road, Roswell, 770-518-7000, and other locations, slopesbbq.com*

Smokejack Southern Grill & BBQ

This is the barbecue joint reenvisioned as a date-night restaurant. The exposed, faded brick of the 1800s building, the professional staff gliding through the dining room's dim lighting, and the well-stocked bar (lots of tempting bourbons and Scotches!) all lend an air of romance to smoked meat. Baby back ribs, with flavors that careen intriguingly between smoky and grilled, stand out among the many meat options. And kudos that the menu offers the ribs either presauced (wet) or unsauced (dry): To my taste, they're tender enough to forgo a slathering in the kitchen. Salads, sandwiches, and entrees such as meatloaf and grilled salmon are available if your paramour wants to avoid sticky fingers. *29 South Main Street, Alpharetta, 770-410-7611, smokejackbbq.com*

Wyatt's Diner

There's zero seating and even less ambience in this rickety shack on Memorial Drive. These guys can cook, though. Quiz them about what's hottest from the oven and stove before making final decisions. My ideal meal from Wyatt's: a few weighty, chomp-worthy ribs without sauce, accompanied by turnip greens and cheddary, featherweight mac and cheese. *1674 Memorial Drive, 404-371-0311*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH MEISTER

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Sam Huff (lower right) kept the tiny nook that was previously Sam & Dave's BBQ1 (above) but also expanded into a space two doors down with plenty of eat-in seating.

#2 Sam's BBQ1

In 2004, Sam Huff, a soon-to-be-"inactive" lawyer and competition barbecue cook, and Dave Poe, whose family ran a barbecue catering company called Stump and Sons, opened Sam & Dave's BBQ1 in Marietta. David Roberts, a restaurant consultant who'd cooked in several fine-dining jewels around Atlanta, soon joined Huff and Poe as their chef. Their tiny strip mall nook sold mostly takeout, but their fusion of skill quickly earned the trio raves. In 2006, they opened a larger Sam & Dave's BBQ2 ten miles away.

Roberts left the staff in late 2007, and then last year Huff and Poe amicably decided to disband. Sam Huff turned the original location into Sam's BBQ1, BBQ2 became Dave Poe's, and David Roberts united with other partners to open Decatur's Community Q BBQ. They all set standards in their communities, and though they've tweaked some recipes, a continuity of style and side items still connects them.

To my taste buds, though, Sam's BBQ1 currently smokes the superior meats. Huff kept the strip mall nook but also expanded two doors down into a larger eat-in space. With every mouthful I eat there, the word "integrity" rings in my head. Baby back ribs hover between tender and taut; beef brisket, thinly sliced and chopped into squares, retains its juiciness; golden, crisp chicken skin yields to plump, smoky meat; and pulled pork is consistently moist. Huff offers three tomato-based sauces with distinct nuances, but I tend to forget about them while I'm madly snarfing. When barbecue is this meticulously crafted, sauce becomes a mere afterthought. *4944 Lower Roswell Road, Marietta, 770-977-3005, bbq1.net*

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DEKALB

Community Q BBQ

David Roberts, once part of the now-dispersed Sam & Dave's BBQ1 dream team, and his partners opened Community Q last year to immediate success. Decaturites have obviously been craving new barbecue options. The ribs rank among the best in the city—tender, dark with complex spices, and with a righteous waft of smokiness. A couple of downsides, though: Pulled pork consistently leans to the dry side, and meats run out more frequently than most barbecue restaurants (call ahead to be sure your favorite cuts are still available that day). But the kitchen compensates with some cheffy specials that miraculously don't detract from the barbecue joint vibe. In the spring I started my meal with velvety Jerusalem artichoke soup and ended it with a lovely variation on strawberry shortcake made with lemon cake. They only made those ribs—and the city's most decadent mac and cheese—even more memorable. *1361 Clairmont Road, Decatur, 404-633-2080, communityqbbq.com*

Garden Produce and Country Store

Don't let the name mislead: Yes, this small roadside business in an idyllic corner of Stone Mountain occasionally sells in-season produce from its garden out back, but its primary focus is cooking. Co-owner and pitmaster Wayne Germon smokes some of the most eloquent ribs in the region—a harmony of meat and melting fat mellowed by time spent over cherrywood. Though barbecued meats grab the most attention, the menu also extends into fried catfish and quesadillas stuffed with beef brisket. Grab a fudgy brownie with nuts for a treat on the ride home. *567 Stephenson Road, Stone Mountain, 770-413-0338, neighborhoodbarbeque.com*

WHO DOES IT BEST?

COLESLAW

Dave Poe's

Too often, mayonnaise-heavy coleslaw has a disconcerting sour edge (and too many restaurants buy it premade from giant food suppliers). Dave Poe's is a refreshing antidote, prepared in-house with crunchy poppy seeds and the acidic pop of crushed pineapple.

Ms. Betty's House of Ribs

The name says it all: You can order grilled chicken at this converted single-wide trailer, but Betty Hamilton and her pitmaster, Ken Glanton, truly dazzle with their ribs. These are plump suckers, lacking char but with rich meat that practically tumbles into your mouth. Two sauces—the sweet, teriyaki-based "boss sauce" and a mustard concoction—are actually ideal when stirred together. Fans of rib tips will adore Ms. Betty's, and the $8.99 portion serves at least two. Custardy mac and cheese, velvety collards, and smooth-textured potato salad complete the takeout feast. *1281 Bouldercrest Drive, 404-243-8484*

Rolling Bones on Edgewood

Old Brick Pit Barbeque

Nostalgia runs high at Old Brick Pit, which has been in operation since 1976 and does brisk business with a mature clientele. And yes, the restaurant's namesake—a square, red-bricked crater covered with daunting metal doors—sits just beyond the counter where you order. Pork ribs, speckled from plenty of black pepper in the sauce, are moist to the point of floppiness. Better options are the gently smoky chicken and the Brunswick stew with a balanced, meaty depth. *4805 Peachtree Road, Chamblee, 770-986-7727*

COBB

Big Shanty Smokehouse

Lucky Kennesaw: Chic Dillard, a restaurant veteran, opened Big Shanty in February 2008 and is giving the barbecue maestros in nearby Marietta some formidable competition. His dry-rubbed ribs develop an intense bark that brings a zigzag of flavors to the pink meat underneath, and his lightly sauced pulled pork stays moist without turning to pap. This is one of the few barbecue joints where you should save room for dessert. Beyond the standout banana pudding made by Dillard's wife, Sissy, look for seasonal pies baked by the couple's daughter, Shannon. *3393 Cherokee Street, Kennesaw, 770-499-7444, bigshantybbq.com*

Dave Poe's

This used to be Sam & Dave's BBQ2, and though Sam Huff and Dave Poe are no longer in business together, the menus at Sam's BBQ1 and Dave Poe's share a similar forthrightness. Goofy signs around the restaurant play on the big guy's name ("Somewhere over the Dave Poe skies are blue"), but the barbecue reveals serious diligence. Campfire-scented meat pulled away from spareribs at a slight touch, and the ribs came barely moistened

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINE KILGORE

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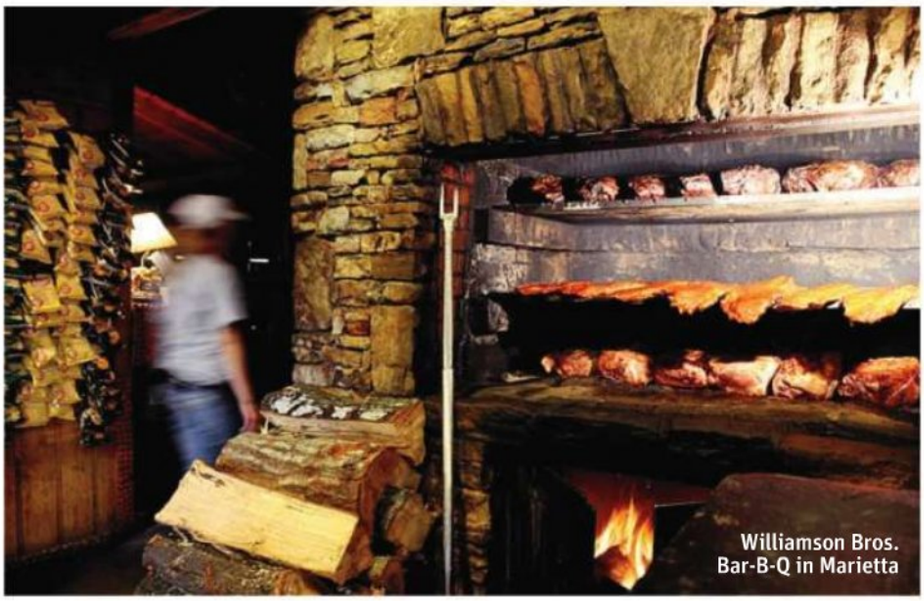
Williamson Bros. Bar-B-Q in Marietta

with a bit of piquant sauce, heightening the flavors rather than masking them. Brisket and pulled pork tasted slightly less smoky but displayed attractive, rosy rings. Impressed as I was, I could also tell that the night I visited I didn't get the meats at their absolute height, which is why Poe's barely missed a spot in our Top Five. At its freshest, this barbecue is surely some of the finest available in the metro area. *660 Whitlock Avenue, Marietta, 770-792-2272, davepoes.com*

Jim 'N Nick's

The preciously staged, old-timey quality to Jim 'N Nick's interior clues you in that this is a chain—one of more than twenty-five franchises in seven states. Meats were uniformly moist but unbalanced in flavor. Pulled pork, beef brisket, and turkey lacked character, while eating the baby backs felt like directly inhaling wood smoke. And sweet notes ran through too much of the food (sugary cheese biscuits?). At least my server was honest: She said a side of creamed spinach more closely resembled spinach dip, and she was right. *4574 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna, 678-556-0011, and other area locations, jimnnicks.com*

Old South Bar-B-Q

In an alternate universe, the staff of Old South would have their own sitcom set in this retro, wood-paneled converted house. Eating here feels like you're eavesdropping on family members, where they chide each other casually and sit down at tables themselves for meals. I suspect lunch is the ideal time to take in the domestic milieu. At dinner one recent night, the pulled pork, beef brisket, and ribs were all past their pinnacle of freshness. *601 Burbank Circle, Smyrna, 770-435-4215, oldsouthbbq.com*

The Rib Ranch

Amid offerings such as a chicken fingers salad and a Tex-Mex burger, the Rib Ranch's actual barbecue needs more careful attention. Beef ribs aren't properly rendered of their fat, and a sweet sauce overwhelms pulled pork and brisket. But wait! Just as I was ready to leave disappointed, my server all but insisted I try the banana pudding. It arrived in a glass bowl looking like a sundae, piled with whipped cream that yielded to extra-creamy, vanilla-scented pudding and lots of banana slices. If I were to organize a progressive barbecue joint dinner in Marietta, the night would definitely end here. *2063 Canton Road, Marietta, 770-422-5755, theribranch.com*

Smokin J's BBQ

Jeff Rittman, an accomplished veteran of national barbecue competitions, opened this family-friendly spot with friend Anthony Stevens last year. At a lunch visit, glossy St. Louis–style cut ribs and heavily smoked beef brisket outshone slightly dry pulled pork and characterless pulled chicken. Tomato-based sauce has a tang akin to Worcestershire sauce. "Pineapple Express"—pineapple bread pudding soufflé offered as a side—doubles as dessert. A barbecue joint novelty: The restaurant also offers pizza with all the traditional toppings. *2145 Roswell Road, Marietta, 770-973-1003, smokinjbbq.com*

Staqs BBQ

Most of the food at this humble business on a lonely stretch of South Cobb Drive is serviceable. But there's one unique specialty that could blossom into the next soul food craze. The menu labels it "A Mess." A made-to-order waffle is piled first with pulled pork, then raisin-studded slaw, and finally a drizzle of syrup. Like chicken and waffles, the combination sounds untenable, but the sweet-and-savory playfulness ends up being downright pleasurable. *2599 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna, 770-438-4301, staqsbbq.com*

Thompson Brothers BBQ

The five Thompson siblings hail from Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the barbecue style is similar to Georgia's—a hodgepodge of influences in which beef and pork are equally welcome on the plate. The smoky, aggressively seasoned ribs win top marks at this no-frills storefront, with the more delicately smoked chopped pork coming in at a respectable second. The kitchen could pull back on the meaty wallop in the collards. I sampled many a slice of lemon pound cake on this quest; Thompson's was by far the most moist and lemony. *2445 Cobb Parkway, Smyrna, 770-818-9098, thompsonbbq.com*

WHO DOES IT BEST?

MACARONI & CHEESE

Community Q BBQ

Sam's BBQ1, Dave Poe's, and Community Q all serve variations of David Roberts's mac and cheese recipe. But since Roberts co-owns Community Q, his rigatoni exalted with heavy cream, cheddar, Monterey Jack, and Parmesan exhibits the most masterful touch.

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PITMASTERS GALLERY

Fransisca Andrin

Old Brick Pit Barbeque

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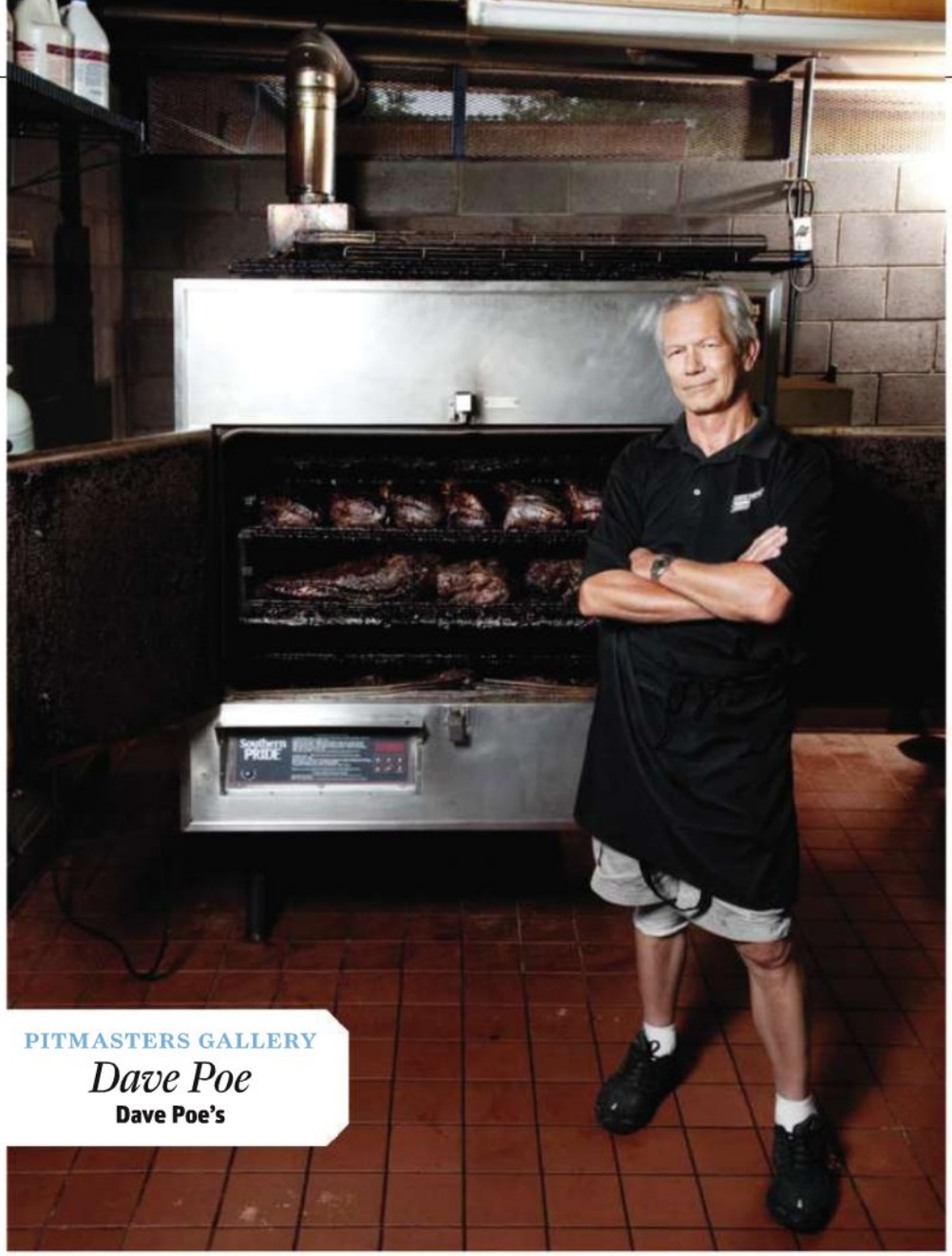

PITMASTERS GALLERY
Dave Poe
Dave Poe's

Williamson Bros. Bar-B-Q

Twenty years ago, Danny and Larry Williamson moved to Georgia from Alabama to begin what would evolve into a local barbecue corporation, with three folksy, high-volume restaurants; a separate catering division; and a line of barbecue sauces (including my favorite bottled version of the South Carolina mustard style). For the amount of food these operations churn through, the barbecue is admirably solid. Spareribs and baby backs have a fair amount of chew, and though they arrive mopped with sauce, the meat's plucky smokiness still prevails. Sides, sadly, can often taste like afterthoughts. Marietta houses the original location, but since that area has risen as a hotbed for some of the most distinguished pitmasters in the metro area, the newer Canton and Douglasville outposts are more of a boon to their communities. *1425 Roswell Road, Marietta, 770-971-3201; 1600 Marietta Highway, Canton, 770-345-9067; 7040 Concourse Parkway, Douglasville, 770-949-5058, williamsonbros.com*

Zeigler's BBQ and Catering

I visited this strip mall spot near the end of my hunt, when my appetite for smoked protein was waning fast. When I tasted Al and Mary Ann Zeigler's spareribs, I was suddenly ravenous again. They must have pulled those fragrant brutes straight from the smoker—they were almost too hot to hold, with crusty, handsomely blackened exteriors and coral-colored meat that pulled cleanly from the bone. The chicken, also marvelously charred, had a spicy-sweet nip. Beef brisket was unashamedly fatty and reminded me of my years in Texas. These meats deserve to be sampled unadorned, so ask for sauces on the side. Side dishes tasted uniformly standard; if they'd been more exceptional, Zeigler's would have competed mightily for a spot in the Top Five. Regardless, I'm still daydreaming about those ribs. *3451 Cobb Parkway, Acworth, 770-529-5227, zeiglersbbq.com*

GWINNETT

Holy Smokes

This low-key strip mall storefront with football-themed decor would satiate a hankering for 'cue if you live in the area, but it isn't worth a trek. Ask for ribs dry so you can splash on the jazzier hot-n-spicy sauce, far more interesting than the sweeter version. Presauced pulled pork had smoky heft but a mushy texture. Exceptionally creamy mac and cheese. *1944 Braselton Highway, Buford, 770-963-0994, holysmokes-bbq.com*

Hometown Barbeque

I remember how revelatory Hometown's rosy, glossy ribs were when I first tried them from the catering trailer out of which George Richbourg and Martha Kelly initially sold their barbecue. If settling into a permanent location pulled some of the magic from those ribs, they remain sound—as does the chicken with agreeably smirched skin. Vie for a spot on the restaurant's tranquil porch. *1173 Lawrenceville Highway, Lawrenceville, 770-963-5383*

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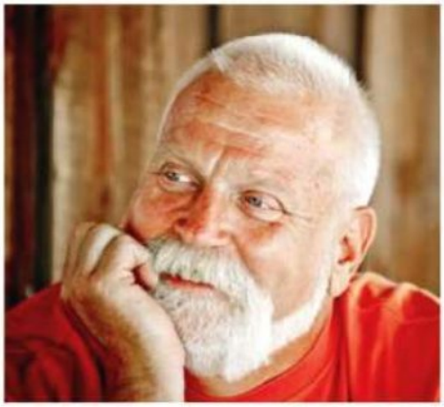

Bill Greenwood (right) opened Swallow at the Hollow in 1999 with a menu that both embraces barbecue traditions and includes atypical sides such as thick, crunchy fried green tomatoes.

Swallow at the Hollow

Greenwood's on Green Street in Roswell has, since the late eighties, been a showcase for chef-owner Bill Greenwood's comforting Americana cooking. In 1999, Greenwood turned his specific gifts toward barbecue when he opened Swallow at the Hollow across the street from Greenwood's. The place looks like a fantasy out of a barbecue-deprived fever dream—a knobby shack whose wide-open interior features a visible kitchen, the kind of wooden tables you want to rest your elbows on, and a small stage where Nashville songwriters and other musicians perform five nights a week.

Like Greenwood's, Swallow serves beloved foods uplifted by attention to detail. Baby back ribs, painted with sauce, leave happy smears across our busy mouths. But wait, what's that unusual, wonderful taste? It's a clear twang of tamarind in the tomato-based sauce, which is layered with flavor after flavor. I prefer the sweet South Carolina–style mustard sauce on a chopped pork sandwich, made with bread baked fresh on the premises. Greenwood is always tinkering with his smoking process. "Right now, we use hickory and oak, but we also throw in some logs from fruit and nut trees at the end of cooking to give the meat a sweet top note on the finishing smolder," he said. "And we intend to be using only locally raised pork and beef for our barbecue within the next year."

Traditionalists may not approve, but I take pleasure in the way Greenwood breaks barbecue commandments. He serves thick fried green tomatoes as an atypical side; pit-smokes Portobello mushrooms and piles them with the green tomatoes and smoked Gouda for a vegetarian dream sandwich; and serves his famous, lofty pies for dessert. The meal may include some unique twists of culinary wizardry, but it all adds up to a universal barbecue experience. *1072 Green Street, Roswell, 678-352-1975, swallowatthehollow.com*

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Mike LaSage (right), P'cheen's chef de cuisine, rocks the smoker every Monday night. His original creations include the "Austin-tatious Sammy," which features smoked, chopped brisket; shredded cabbage; and fried shoestring onions on grilled garlic Texas toast.

#4 P'cheen

As my barbecue search wound down, friends increasingly wanted recommendations based on what I'd discovered. "Check out Marietta, or Gainesville, or Jackson," I'd tell them. "But what if we don't want to drive that far?" they'd cry. "What's the best place *intown*?" The answer usually surprised them. "P'cheen in the Old Fourth Ward," I'd say. "But only on Monday nights."

Mike LaSage is the chef de cuisine at P'cheen, which bills itself as an "international bistro and pub." Its globally influenced menu changes constantly, and technically the cooks now offer some variation of barbecue daily. But Monday is when LaSage busts out his "Mike's Bone Lick BBQ" menu devoted to the hedonism of smoked meats. Before you dive into the ribs or other main course options, start with a plate of LaSage's jumbo wings. I've never been much of a wing guy, but these nibbles, stacked artfully on a plate, converted me. Smokiness and a charred grill savor equally permeate the meat, as does a crisscross of spice after marinating for forty-eight hours in Frank's RedHot pepper sauce.

The same finesse carries into the classic meats. LaSage continually evolves his menu, but count on dry-rubbed baby back ribs, ropy chunks of soft pulled pork, and sultry beef brisket. He makes different sausages in-house, including a feisty Louisiana-style andouille that paired seamlessly with a side of red beans and rice. With its smartly curated list of craft beers and witty cocktails, P'cheen also has the best libations alongside barbecue—intown or anywhere in North Georgia. *701-5 Highland Avenue, 404-529-8800, pcheen.com*

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JR's Log House

With the film industry booming in Georgia, location scouts seeking 1970s authenticity should take note of JR's: The inside is awash in the shades of brown ubiquitous to restaurants from the *Welcome Back, Kotter* era. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner run the gamut of Southern specialties, from biscuits with streak o' lean to fried catfish. But barbecue dominates the lunch and dinner menus. Opt for the smoky spareribs over the chewier "meaty loin ribs" (JR's version of baby backs). In keeping with the Southern mind-set, choose meat-and-three-style sides such as sweet potato casserole alongside the more typical Brunswick stew. *6601 Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, Norcross, 770-449-6426, jrsloghouse.com*

Spiced Right

Three words: pulled pork sandwich. These pitmasters know how to push the limits of piggy goodness. The ambrosial meat verges on salty and greasy but never crosses into excess. Dab on one of three sauces—vinegar-and-tomato-based mild, peppery hot, or "smooth," the sweet option. Dry-rubbed ribs are big and marbled. Hash brown casserole could be a brilliant addition to the lexicon of barbecue sides, but the recipe needs to be a touch creamier or cheesier. Instead choose the fried okra, flecked with crunchy salt. On days when the heat isn't intense enough to melt hairspray or foundation, the business crowd flocks to the covered deck at the original Lilburn location. *5364 Lawrenceville Highway, Lilburn, 770-564-0355; 635 Atlanta Street, Roswell, 678-352-9633, spicedright.com*

WHO DOES IT BEST?

BAKED BEANS

Blind Pig BBQ

It is decreed within Southern culture that beans served with barbecue will be sweet. But must they be insipidly so? The blend of spices from the additions of sausage and barbecue sauce impart the Blind Pig's beans with an intriguing, currylike taste. They stand proudly complex alongside the brawny meats.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF PRIMO (TOP) AND BIG GREEN EGG (BOTTOM)

Local Grills Make Good

I FIRST SAW A PRIMO at the Jack Daniel's World Championship Invitational Barbecue—roughly the World Series of grilled meat—last October. All the international teams were cooking on oval-shaped, ceramic **Primos** (left) and raving about them, in a half-dozen tongues, to the Weber-owning crowds. Unable to ship their own cookers and smokers from Estonia and Switzerland to Lynchburg, Tennessee, these teams had been given Primos by George Samaras, owner of the Norcross-based company that manufactures the cookers. They are, proclaims Samaras, "Webers on steroids."

For Samaras, an oval-shaped, chain-smoking Greek man trained as a pharmacist, local production means quality control. The grills are molded, poured, and then fired in a giant, $2 million kiln only fifty feet from his desk. "This is how they make toilets," he chuckles. "Different material, same process."

Twenty years ago, it was the gas grill revolution. Ten years ago, it was stainless steel. "Now," says Samaras, "it's the ceramic era." Ceramic grills look good on a patio, but the appeal is performance. They stay hotter for longer than their steel counterparts, enabling the slow smoking and low-temperature cooking that produces the best meat. And Primo, which has just two dozen employees, is not the only Georgia company enjoying red-hot success in the ceramic grill playing field. "We're the major player in the market," says Jodi Burson, marketing manager of Tucker-based **Big Green Egg** (below right). "And this is the fastest-growing segment of the grill market right now." Having sold some 1 million Eggs thus far, BGE believes it controls more than 80 percent of the ceramic grill market. (Privately held, neither Primo nor BGE discloses its sales figures.)

Big Green Egg began production of its breakout ceramic design in 1994, but founder Ed Fisher had been selling kamados—enclosed clay cookers shipped from Asia—from a store at the corner of Clairmont Road and Buford Highway since 1974. The handmade clay cookers arrived from Japan and Taiwan by the dozen, often cracked. BGE's grills (a company in Mexico manufactures its durable ceramic) are much stronger than their predecessors.

The Egg's design has earned it worldwide fans, but Samaras doesn't hesitate to proselytize his patented adaptation. "The Primo's oval shape gives you much more flexibility," he says. "You can cook with direct and indirect heat at the same time." He demonstrates how easily imaginary fish and slabs of ribs fit inside. "The expense is not buying it," says Samaras. "It's filling it with meat." Primo's three models start around $740. 5999 Goshen Springs Road, Norcross, 770-729-1110, primogrill.com. Big Green Eggs come in five sizes and start at $259. 3417 Lawrenceville Highway, Tucker, 770-934-5300, biggreenegg.com. —CHARLES BETHEA

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PITMASTERS GALLERY

Wayne Germon

Garden Produce and Country Store

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH MEISTER

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CLAYTON

Dean's Barbecue

Away from the carbon monoxide congestion of Jonesboro's Tara Boulevard, down a patch of country road that sets a verdant preamble, Dean's has been serving barbecue since 1947. It is obviously adored by locals, who cram the front counter area of the low, wood-sided building and order from the short menu. Chopped pork sandwich, Brunswick stew, coleslaw, chips, tea: That's about it. Dean's stew is pureed thick and registers much smokier than the meat on the sandwich, which comes dressed in tangy vinegar sauce and topped with pickle slices. Honestly, Dean's might not serve the most transcendent barbecue, but the palpable sense of tradition makes it worth a visit. *9480 South Main Street, Jonesboro, 770-471-0138*

CHEROKEE

Bub-Ba-Q

Owner William Latimer consistently wins titles at professional barbecue competitions, but what's even more impressive is how capably he's trained his cooks to execute his vision. Warm spices rubbed into lacquered ribs tickle the palate. Chopped pork has a frizzled texture that looks as though it might be dry, but each bite was sumptuously moist. "Burnt ends" feature saucy beef brisket nuggets I would gladly substitute for popcorn while watching a movie. Four sauces—mustard, vinegar, hot and spicy, and sweet—have all been succinctly calibrated. The nondescript dining room (red walls, concrete floors, a display of towering cakes from Alpine Bakery in one corner) doesn't prepare you for the food's marvelous attention to detail. This one merits a drive. *10020 Highway 92, Woodstock, 678-402-1662; 1976 Highway 53 West, Jasper, 706-692-7929, bub-ba-q.com*

Bub-Ba-Q in Woodstock

J.D.'s Bar-B-Que

J.D.'s does have tables, but most customers swoop in to pick up their to-go orders from the counter. Ribs, pulled pork, brisket, and chicken come doused with tomato-based sauce, but its mild nature doesn't tamp down the nuances of the hickory- and oak-smoked meats. Go low-carb here and gorge on proteins; unexciting sides and soggy cobbler don't add much to the meal. Between the impressive meat cooking I found both at Bub-Ba-Q and J.D.'s, I'd say Woodstock is an emerging barbecue hotbed. *6577 Bells Ferry Road, Woodstock, 678-445-7730, jdsbbq.net*

Two Brothers Bar-B-Q

Antique guns on the wall? This venerable joint has been around since 1974, and it's no Disney version of a barbecue destination. Shelves around the edges of the room contain all manner of rural curios, from a dull, rusted saw to collections of old glass milk bottles. Unfortunately, my eyes indulged more than my taste buds did on my visit to Two Brothers: It was peak dinner hour, but the ribs tasted past their prime, the pulled pork was dry, and the Brunswick stew could have doubled for spaghetti meat sauce. Just an off night, perhaps? *1695 Old Canton Road, Ball Ground, 770-735-2900*

DOUGLAS

Wallace Barbecue

There's midcentury modern, and then there's the design aesthetic to which Wallace, opened in 1966, adheres: midcentury barbecue. A pig-themed weathervane atop the building. An old Coca-Cola vending machine and other red and white Coke souvenirs spread around the rambling restaurant. Plastic pitchers of sweet tea left on the table by waitresses who would fit right in at Mel's Diner. The menu also offers plenty of Americana (cheeseburgers, chili dogs, chopped steak plate), but when it comes to the actual barbecue, opt for the ribs. Ask for the sauce on the side: The mustardy hot sauce on the table beats the thinner stuff they use in the kitchen. When the fries arrive at their freshest, they have the droopy-crisp appeal of Boardwalk-style spuds. *3035 Veterans Memorial Highway, Austell, 770-739-1686, wallacebarbecue.com*

WHO DOES IT BEST?

BANANA PUDDING

Big Shanty Smokehouse

You'd think peach cobbler would be the default dessert at Georgia barbecue joints, but banana pudding holds that place of esteem. Sissy Dillard (the matriarch of the family that runs Big Shanty) makes it simple, fluffy, comforting, and studded with Nilla Wafers, just as it should be.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMEY GUY

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COWETA

Sprayberry's Barbecue

In operation since 1926 and still very popular with locals, the Sprayberry's of today radiates a cafeteria quality. Honest baby back ribs (coated with a thin wash akin to diluted steak sauce), respectable Brunswick stew, and the fried peach pie (choose it over the banal apple version) were the meal's highlights. *229 Jackson Street, Newnan, 770-253-4421; 1060 Highway 34 East, Newnan, 770-253-5080, sprayberrysbbq.com*

BUTTS

Fresh Air Bar-B-Que

After the hour-plus drive from Atlanta, the perfumed air from Fresh Air's billowing chimneys made me feel like a Looney Tunes character drifting on an aromatic cloud. This standard-bearer opened in 1929: It's no stranger to barbecue's cheering effects during challenging economic times. The customer line winds among the tables in the building's main, cabinlike room. At the original location (there's also an outpost in Macon), chopped pork headlines solo: no ribs or chicken. The Deluxe Plate includes chopped pork, Brunswick stew, a drink, and a cup of slaw. This is the quintessential Georgia pork sandwich, the meat minced and mixed with just enough sauce for a vinegary tingle. The real epicurean grail, though, is the stew: meaty, smoky, sweet, and tangy. I looked up after my first spoonful and said, "Ah. *Now* I understand what this dish is supposed to taste like." *1164 Highway 42 South, Flovilla, 770-775-3182, freshairbarbecue.com*

HENRY

Pippin's Barbecue

Given the restaurant's unassuming corner in a small strip mall, you'd never suspect to find the powerful-looking Southern Pride barbecue oven built into the back wall of Pippin's diminutive dining room. The owners hung antlers around the oven to complete the red-blooded lodge homage. Swing by at lunch for the fetchingly charred baby back ribs, Pippin's best offering. *40 Sims Street, McDonough, 770-957-2539, pippinsbarbecue.com*

BARTOW

Scott's Walk-Up Bar-B-Q

If you're driving to Chattanooga for the day, Scott Panter's unassuming restaurant is worth the short detour from I-75. Among all his well-prepared meats, the pulled pork won my highest praises—particularly when anointed with Panter's peppery mustard sauce. (He also sells his sauces by the bottle.) Accompany the barbecue with Brunswick stew that possesses an unusually meaty depth, and finish the meal with peach cobbler (the finest I found on this search) topped with homemade vanilla ice cream. Despite the name, this isn't just takeout: There's plenty of seating both inside and on the covered patio. *206 North Tennessee Street, Cartersville, 770-382-1600, scottswalkupbbq.com* ■

Up in Smoke

Barbecue becomes a percentages game when you're chowing through fifty-eight joints. I was bound to hit some duds. Below are the ten spots whose food left the least favorable impressions on my hickory-imbued taste buds.

› Abdullah the Butcher House of Ribs and Chinese Food
As the lengthy moniker implies, this is really more of a soul food draw (named for the pro wrestler who owns it) than a true 'cue joint. Sodden ribs, but excellent turnip greens. *2387 Fairburn Road, 404-629-2332*

› Anderson's Old Fashion Bar-B-Q
If the musk of freshly cooked barbecue doesn't linger in the air, opt out. I went on a day when the pit was cold, and the old-tasting, microwaved pulled pork didn't live up to this community pillar's reputation. And the only sides available from the extensive list were potato salad and coleslaw, both undistinguished. *65 Willis Mill Road, 404-696-8144*

› Billy Bob's Bar-B-Q
Billy Bob's gets high marks in Carrollton's local press, but I encountered ribs slaked in saccharine sauce (with another sauce on the side that tasted like ballpark mustard) and desiccated pulled pork. *811 South Park Street, Carrollton, 770-830-1217*

› Fred's Bar-B-Que House
An inviting perch on a busy street and warm-spirited staffers can't compensate for sauce-drenched barbecue with a chemical-tasting smokiness. *541 Thornton Road, Lithia Springs, 770-941-1155*

› Jones Barbecue Outpost
The sauce at this roadside takeout spot had an interesting citrus tang, but it couldn't revive ribs that lacked any woody perfume. *945 North Park Street, Carrollton, 770-832-1803*

› Maddy's
Opened by a former manager of Fat Matt's, Maddy's serves inconsistently textured ribs (too chewy on one side, fall-apart tender on the other) that don't have the same appeal as Matt's. *1479 Scott Boulevard, Decatur, 404-377-0301, maddysribs.com*

› Old Hickory House
The two remaining locations of this once-prominent chain now drift into meat-and-three territory. Choose a vegetable plate over lackluster barbecue. *5490 Chamblee Dunwoody Road, Dunwoody, 770-671-8185; 2202 Northlake Parkway, Tucker, 770-939-8621, oldhickoryhouse.com*

› Old McDonald's
Checkered window drapes and signs with goofy sayings set a charming stage, but utterly gray pork ribs and acrid bits of too-charred bark mixed into chopped beef diminished the appeal. *5774 Holiday Road, Buford, 770-945-8608*

› One Star Ranch
Overcooked meats (held too long before serving) combined with indifferent service only advanced Buckhead's status as a barbecue wasteland. *25 Irby Avenue, 404-233-7644; 732 North Main Street, Alpharetta, 770-475-6695, onestarranch.com*

› Tookes Country Barbeque
When I saw other plates swimming in sauce, I asked for my sauce on the side. The request was ignored, but ketchupy sweetness couldn't disguise tough ribs. Mac and cheese was an oily mess. Decent chicken, at least. *6012 Highway 42, Rex, 770-968-4190*

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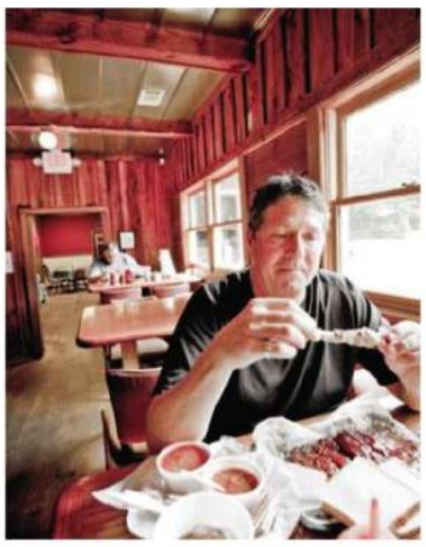

A fanciful sign points you toward Jackson's Blind Pig, where owner Ron Brown smokes ribs, pork shoulder, and turkey using hickory and walnut woods.

#5 Blind Pig BBQ

A buddy and I chanced upon Blind Pig BBQ randomly. We were in the Jackson area to visit the legendary Fresh Air Bar-B-Que. After slurping down revelatory Brunswick stew there, my friend Leon and I plotted a course for our next meal in McDonough. "Look! Have you heard of that place?" asked Leon as we drove, pointing to a sign not far from Fresh Air that advertised barbecue. It pictured a pig wearing dark sunglasses and walking with a blind cane. I hadn't, but I made a U-turn.

We walked into a building that, by barbecue joint standards, looked freshly minted; owner Ron Brown opened the place in April 2009. A screened-in dining area to the left had the airiness of a porch attached to a lakeside cottage. We ordered at the counter, a young staffer delivered trays to us, and then we each snatched a rib. Leon had put up with eating a lot of mediocre barbecue on previous jaunts. Now, we looked at each other as we chomped the shiny rib meat down to the nub and nodded knowingly. This wasn't just good barbecue—it was exceptional.

Brown keeps his menu uncomplicated. He smokes ribs, pork shoulder, and turkey using hickory and walnut woods. The kitchen makes only four sides: astoundingly good baked beans (sausage is the secret), coleslaw that stays crunchy, home fries (well-salted, deep-fried potato slices), and a corn-heavy Brunswick stew that rivals Fresh Air in its complexity. In a rural setting an hour or so south of Atlanta, the simple purity and the fresh hominess of the food feel exactly right. *873 Barnetts Bridge Road, Jackson, 770-504-0250*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMEY GUY

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MOTHER NATURE'S DADDY

Don't call him a tree hugger. Ad man Joel Babbit taps into the new environmental movement to build an online empire.

by **ELIZABETH FLORIO**

photographs by **NEDA ABGHARI**

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GOD CREATED THE WORLD IN SIX DAYS. Joel Babbit created Mother Nature Network in one. The concept of an environmental website aimed at mainstream audiences had been germinating in his mind for some time. And the hiring, designing, building—that would take months. But the real genesis of MNN, as it's called, occurred between lunch and dinner, when the longtime advertising executive secured $10 million in start-up funds from a handful of powerful friends on the brink of a global recession.

As of noon on March 11, 2008, Babbit had no plans to send his career whirling like an unleashed balloon. Then president of GCI, an international public relations firm with clients such as Nike and Starbucks, he'd arranged a lunch with Tom Bell, then chairman and CEO of Cousins Properties, at the white-tablecloth business club in Downtown's 191 Peachtree Tower. It was just a friends' lunch; both men worked in the Cousins-owned building and frequently dined together. But Babbit couldn't help himself. Working on an account for Dell, he'd seen the hundreds of millions the computer giant poured into environmental marketing. And in refining his own environmental literacy, he'd discovered that most websites in the field—sites such as Grist or Riverkeeper or EPA.gov—were highly technical, narrow in focus, or too political. There was an untapped opportunity, he told Bell, to create an engaging, approachable source for environmental news and information—the kind of website where a high schooler could do research for a science project or a new mother could scout organic baby products.

Bell knew it wasn't a great time to start a business, but he'd also seen a change in his own industry as more tenants desired environmentally sensitive, energy-efficient properties. "How much do you think it would cost to start something like that?" he asked.

Babbit threw out a figure: $10 million.

"I'll give you 20 percent," Bell said, offering a cut of his own substantial fortune. Then he picked up his phone and dialed Pete Correll, past chairman of Georgia-Pacific and current head of Atlanta Equity, also located in 191. After lunch, Babbit dropped by Correll's office and gave the same pitch, and Correll pledged a similar amount.

Later that evening, Babbit had dinner with Doug Hertz, president of beverage distributing company United Distributors and a friend of thirty-plus years. Hertz wanted in. At home, he phoned another friend, Rolling Stones keyboardist and Middle Georgia tree farmer Chuck Leavell. Leavell, who'd wrapped a two-year tour with the Stones the previous year and whose resume as an environmentalist includes lobbying Congress and authoring a children's book, signed on as a fourth investor. All told, Babbit amassed a commitment of roughly $10 million—including a "significant" contribution of his own, he says—between lunch and the time his head hit the pillow. (A fifth investor, Atlanta Equity's Gerry Benjamin, came on a few days later.) He gave notice at GCI the next day.

Says Bell, "I've raised a lot of money in my life, but that was just unbelievable." Says Hertz, "It was probably the worst time to launch a new idea, or thirty days in advance of the worst time. But if you wait till the stars and the moon are aligned, it may be somebody else's idea."

Friends of Babbit know he rarely dismisses a big idea. As one-half of legendary 1980s advertising duo Babbit & Reiman, he once turned Reagan press footage into an Applebee's promo, earning a cease and desist order from the White House. As marketing officer during Maynard Jackson's third mayoral term, he investigated beaming ads from outer space, prompting City Council to draft an ordinance expressly banning the practice. He has made a career out of pushing the boundaries of advertising propriety, of making worlds collide. MNN is no exception. Tom Bell is the current vice chairman and chair-elect of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a consistent and controversial opponent of climate change legislation. Pete Correll helmed a company whose business is turning trees into paper and building products. Babbit, for his part, bought a hybrid and admits he buys into global warming—even if he doesn't broadcast it in polite company—but would hardly be called a tree hugger.

But Mother Nature Network is a dot-com, not a dot-org, with a goal of turning a profit. And the engine for the site's profitability is advertising. Tempting as it may be to pin an altruistic motive on his foray into environmental journalism, fifty-six-year-old Babbit is dealing in the same trade that has transfixed him since he was a young kid watching Frito-Lay and Alka-Seltzer commercials in the era of whiskey-swilling Mad Men. Of course, the business of online advertising has become increasingly fraught, as advertisers question the value of traditional display ads and content providers seek to preserve an uncluttered viewing experience. Even a website as lauded as the *New York Times* has struggled to subsist on ad dollars alone. So at MNN Babbit has built a model that's simultaneously stripped down and amped up—one that provides exclusive, in-depth presence for a few key sponsors | CONTINUED ON PAGE 96

LETTERING BY JESSICA HISCHE

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Chuck Leavell

"People have started to get it and say, 'Do we only have a limited time to turn our planet around? And if that's true, ***WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?***' That's what we're trying to do at MNN—be a resource for people so they can make these changes. I'm a father, a grandfather now. I want to pass on to my heirs a world where they can enjoy the things I enjoy."

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SHOTGUN *chic*

This Midtown abode and backyard office take their cues from historic cottage style

by LISA MOWRY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN RUBINSTEIN
STYLING BY ANNETTE JOSEPH

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WALK TO WORK The carriage house where McGinnis works and entertains, shown here, has a similar facade to the main house, but with dormer windows. The pond out front is made from an old sugar kettle.

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FIFTEEN YEARS ago, when Jeff Jones bought a 1930s Midtown house that had been destroyed by fire, the residential designer vowed to rebuild an even better one. "You always hate to lose an old house, but sometimes it's an opportunity to redesign and do it right," he says. Jones drew inspiration from a classically designed cottage in Inman Park, with symmetrical windows and a wide center hall providing an axis for the floor plan. After studying historic plans and experimenting with scale, he designed and built this deceivingly simple house with cedar shingles, four narrow columns, and a brick courtyard garden in front.

Although the updated, shotgun-inspired house won a local urban design award, Jones is almost more proud of a nearby resident's comment. "He said this new house fits in the neighborhood better than a lot of the older houses," recalls Jones. "So many of the older houses have been changed so that they've lost their charm."

This inviting residence soon caught the eye of Joe McGinnis, who used to slow down whenever he was driving by so he could get a close look at his favorite house. When McGinnis spotted a "For Sale" sign in 2000, he slammed on the brakes and went right to Jones, even though the house was already under contract. Fortunately for McGinnis, the first buyer dropped out, so he purchased the home and moved in with his partner, Alan Frazier.

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McGinnis was immediately as smitten with the character-rich interior as he had been with the exterior. In the living room, twin salvaged brick fireplaces pass through to the kitchen and dining room, a reference to the days when homes relied on fire for cooking and heating. Weathered shutters serve as doors for kitchen cabinets. And the pine floors came from a timber company in the Northeast. Jones was taken aback when the boards arrived covered in black soot. "Fortunately, all it took was a light sanding to give them a good patina," Jones says.

Wanting more of a live/work/play setting, McGinnis designed and built a carriage house studio for the backyard, where he could run his brand marketing

LEFT "The front of the house [entrance shown here] is so comfortable," says residential designer and former owner Jeff Jones, who built this house in the mid-nineties. "The yard and front porch seem to merge together."

ABOVE The larger scale of windows and fireplaces throughout the house brings a level of sophistication to its cottagey style. Homeowner Joe McGinnis furnished the living room with modern upholstered pieces mixed with antiques.

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RIGHT AND OPPOSITE McGinnis chose classic midcentury office furniture, shown at right. Opposite, an original 7Up sign by artist Peter Max—known for his iconic pop style in the sixties and seventies—caught McGinnis's eye at a local flea market. The coffee table made of recycled barn wood complements a pair of Le Corbusier armchairs.

BELOW The kitchen's brick fireplace passes through to the living room, as does its twin in the adjacent dining room. Adding character to the kitchen are weathered shutters turned into cabinet doors, salvaged floors from a warehouse, metal brackets holding up the mantel, and an oversized cog serving as art.

business, Voyage Communications. With its similar facade of shingles, columns, and a water feature out front, the smaller version pays homage to the main structure. "We really respected Jeff's vision and wanted to do right by his example," says McGinnis, who even ran his plans by Jones for approval. "The challenge was not to overdesign it, but to honor the original vision of simplicity and balance."

McGinnis and Frazier's furniture reflects their creative spirit as well. Midcentury items, flea market finds, and newer pieces are carefully mixed with antiques and contemporary art. The living room, for example, started with a button-tufted blue wool chair with swanky, retro-style lines. Other furnishings range from leather Barcelona stools and Saarinen tulip tables to an oversized Italian urn and an antique wooden chest. "It's not an identifiable look," McGinnis explains. "It's more of a collection."

With its wall-sized 7Up sign, the home office is always a conversation piece. "I knew I wanted the sign when I first saw it at Kudzu Antiques," says McGinnis. At first the dealer didn't want to sell, but after months of persuading, McGinnis "wore him down" and brought home the iconic Peter Max advertisement. Midcentury desk furniture also channels the sixties, a heyday of the advertising industry. "I was thinking *Bewitched* when I decorated the office," says McGinnis. "I wanted a nod to Darrin's office." After all, it's his business to recognize a memorable brand. ■

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Georgia DREAM ★ TOWNS

Our roots run deep in Georgia, and invariably they are bound up around our beloved small towns. Come along as we celebrate the history and hospitality of some of the state's wonderful hometowns.

By Susanna Rodell ★ *Photography by Emily Brock*

Madison

ROOTS

The first town lots in Madison (named, not surprisingly, for President James Madison) were sold in 1809. The population grew as wealthy cotton plantation owners who lived in the county began building town houses.

During the Civil War, the town largely escaped Sherman's destruction. Local lore has it that Joshua Hill, a former U.S. senator who had opposed secession, talked him into sparing it. Madison is still known as "the town too pretty to burn." Shortly after the war, in 1866, the town was incorporated.

Decades later, during the Depression, Madison fared better than many of her neighbors; still, the boll weevil took a toll. Dairy farming helped revive the local economy, and the advent of Interstate 20 and the construction of Lake Oconee in the 1970s accelerated Madison's growth. Tourism now contributes greatly to the local economy.

WHAT WE LOVE

Thanks to Sherman's act of mercy, downtown Madison still has the spacious feel of a nineteenth-century community. Life seems to move more slowly, and locals claim it's still a place where kids can safely play in the street. Pride in the town's appearance is huge. Example: Residents may not put their garbage out on the sidewalk—it is collected from the back of the houses.

Dog Ear Books, which occupies

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Georgia DREAM TOWNS

a lovely old house on South Main Street, is a local institution that bills itself as selling "books, coffee, records and miscellany." Antique stores abound, as well as charming inns and restaurants, including Madison Drug Company, which features a grill serving American comfort classics and a working soda fountain from the late 1800s.

DON'T MISS

ANNUAL INDEPENDENCE DAY CONCERT AND PICNIC
JULY 4
Celebrate our nation's independence with some good old-fashioned fun. Picnic and enjoy patriotic music by the Athens Classic City Band on the front lawn. Always free!

FALL KITCHEN TOUR
SEPTEMBER 7–18
Tour distinctive kitchens throughout Madison and Morgan County. See a range of styles and get ideas for updating your kitchen.

6TH ANNUAL FALL FESTIVAL & CHILI COOK-OFF
OCTOBER 2
Sample a mix of chili from amateurs and experts from around the Southeast. Enjoy live entertainment and shopping at a range of vendor booths.

Suwanee

ROOTS

Suwanee started out as a Native American village at the intersection of Suwanee Creek and the Chattahoochee River. In 1838 the Suwanee Post Office was established, and the federal government recognized the settlement as a town.

The village really took off after 1871, when the Southern Railroad established a depot. Ten years later a narrow-gauge railroad was built between Lawrenceville and Suwanee, and the town became a transfer point for passengers on their way to Atlanta.

For much of its history, Suwanee's economy centered on cotton. The first cotton gin, at the corner of Jackson and Scales Streets, was completed in 1875. The town was incorporated in 1949 but remained a small agricultural community until the seventies. The population in 1970 was 615. Then in the early 1970s, I-85 came through, connecting Suwanee to Atlanta and the rest of the nation. Today the population has swelled to more than 16,000.

WHAT WE LOVE

Suwanee is a city of parks and takes pride in its status as a green community. The town has just launched Harvest Farm, a huge communal organic garden. Through its Open Space Initiative, launched in 2002, it has acquired more than 300 acres of open space and created four new parks. It also has a large trail system. Suwanee Creek Park is the main trailhead for the four-mile Suwanee Creek Greenway.

Suwanee's historic Old Town includes a super playground for kids, PlayTown Suwanee, an outdoor pavilion for community events, and a historic red caboose that kids can climb on.

DON'T MISS

SUWANEE FESTIVAL OF BOOKS
AUGUST 28-29
A celebration of reading, writing, and literacy, featuring novelist, screenwriter, and journalist Terry Kay as keynote speaker.

TASTE OF SUWANEE
OCTOBER 16
The town's best restaurants, bakeries,

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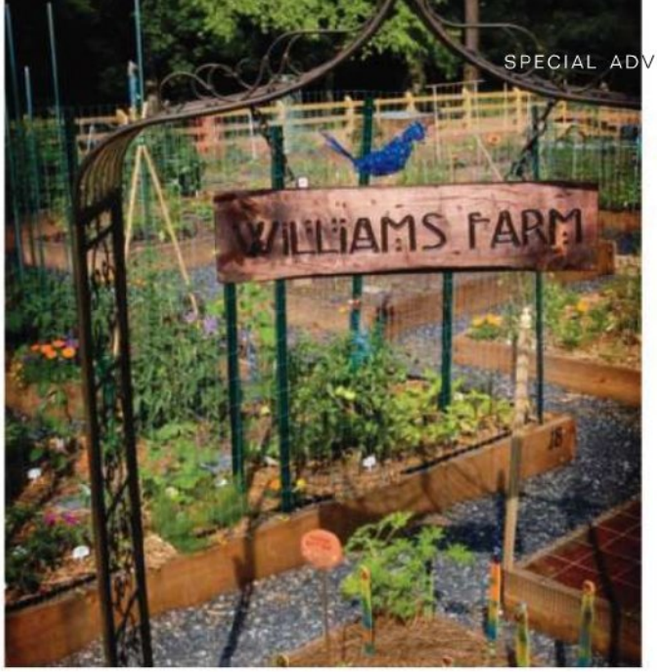


JOHN DISNEY

and caterers showcase their specialties, along with local performers, artists' booths, children's activities, and a large silent auction.

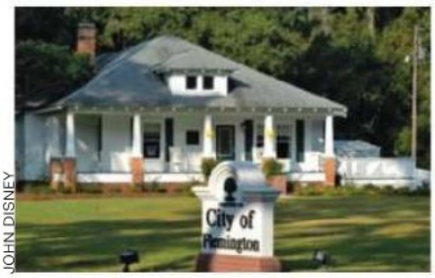
OLD TOWN FESTIVAL AND CABOOSE LIGHTING
DECEMBER 3
This wonderful tradition began in 1994 after Norfolk Southern donated a retired caboose to set up in Old Town in recognition of Suwanee's place in railroad history.

Flemington

ROOTS

In the early 1800s, rice plantation owners in the coastal Midway District began to build summer homes on higher ground to escape the swamps during the hot months. Among these was William Fleming, who in 1815 established a small village in a place he called Gravel Hill, keeping a parcel for himself and distributing others to his friends. Eventually the summer homes became permanent residences.

In 1850 the town changed its name from Gravel Hill to Flemington in honor of its founder. The City of Flemington was not incorporated until 1941. For many years the City Council met in the social hall of the Flemington Presbyterian Church. Recently the city purchased the former manse from the minister of the church and renovated it to convert it to a city hall, which opened in 2005.



JOHN DISNEY

WHAT WE LOVE

Flemington today remains a tiny town with a population under 500. While many larger communities like to boast that they retain the feel of a small town, Flemington is the real thing. The town provides a brochure with a driving tour of its historic houses.

Stacy's Store, established in the late 1800s, also served as the town's post office for many years and had its own gristmill to grind local farmers' corn into grits and meal. The store remains in the Stacy family. The family also owns the nearby historic Trask House, built in the late 1800s, and operates a florist business from the historic home.

Gravel Hill Farms is located on one of the town's original lots distributed by William Fleming. Now Alicia and Jim Floyd operate a successful equestrian operation there, breeding and raising American Saddlebred horses.

DON'T MISS

LIBERTY FEST
JULY 16-17
Held in nearby Hinesville, this countywide festival features a street dance, food and drink, arts and crafts, historical displays, and a car and motorcycle show.

7TH ANNUAL BLUES AND BBQ
SEPTEMBER 18
Celebrate this perfect pairing of blues music and barbecue in neighboring Hinesville. Eric Culberson, a rising star on the national blues scene known for his fiery guitar work, will wow the crowd. In addition to the tunes and the 'cue, the event will feature a beer garden.

EARTH DAY IN THE PARK
APRIL 22, 2011
Have fun learning about water conservation, organic foods, organic gardening, eco-friendly products, green energy, and recycling through exhibits, games, crafts, giveaways, face painting, tattoos, music, and more.

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Dunwoody

ROOTS

Dunwoody existed as a community for nearly two centuries before it was incorporated as a city in 2008. It's named for Major Charles Dunwody, a hero of the Civil War who fought at Manassas. (An extra "o" was added to the name of the town.)

The historic—and still active—1829 Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church is located at the corner of Roberts Drive and Spalding Drive. Some of Dunwoody's founders are buried in its historic cemetery. The Roswell Railroad, running along the route of the present-day Chamblee-Dunwoody Road to the Chattahoochee River, opened in 1881 and operated for forty years. In 1905 Theodore Roosevelt traveled through and made a whistle stop in Dunwoody on his way to Roswell.

In April 1998 a tornado tore through parts of Dunwoody, damaging thousands of homes and destroying tens of thousands of native trees. The storm was referred to as the Dunwoody Tornado since the town bore most of the damage.

WHAT WE LOVE

Dunwoody is the third wealthiest city in Georgia. Its two extremes are embodied in the ultramodern Perimeter Mall and the quaint Dunwoody Village. Developed in 1971, the mall is a small city in itself, boasting four chain department stores, 200 specialty shops, and six restaurants. Dunwoody Village has quite a different feel. The historic Dunwoody Farmhouse, which now serves as special events facility, sets the architectural tone for this part of the town.

Dunwoody is also home to some of the Atlanta area's signature restaurants. The first location of Atlanta institution Café Intermezzo, the wildly popular European-style coffeehouse, opened in the town in the 1979 and is still going strong. McKendrick's Steak House has been serving some of the finest steaks and seafood in the metro since 1995. And nearby Alon's Bakery & Market, another Atlanta icon, boasts a fistful of "Best of" awards from local publications.

DUNWOODY CVB

DON'T MISS

FOURTH OF JULY PARADE

JULY 5

Enjoy marching bands, floats, clowns, animal units, and local celebrities—the whole nine yards. Last year more than 2,500 people participated and 32,000 spectators showed up.

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DUNWOODY CAR SHOW
AUGUST 14
Organized to raise money for Georgia athletes participating in the Special Olympics, the show features a soapbox show along with classic cars.

DUNWOODY MUSIC FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 23-24
Take in thirty-two hours of music over the course of the weekend, along with a chili cook-off, children's activities, and food and craft vendors.

McDonough

ROOTS

McDonough is the county seat for Henry County (named after patriot Patrick Henry). The county's land was acquired through the first Treaty of Indian Springs on January 8, 1821.

Founded in 1893, the town is named after Commodore Thomas McDonough, who won the decisive Battle of Lake Champlain in the War of 1812.

Within a few years of its founding, McDonough became a prosperous town with a public square containing a brick courthouse, several stores, a post office, taverns and inns, and three churches. It was also a station on the New York-to-New Orleans stagecoach line.

The town played a bit part in *Gone With the Wind*. As Atlanta burned, the McDonough Road was the setting for Rhett Butler's observation to Scarlett: "Take a good look, my dear. It's a historic moment. You can tell your grandchildren how you watched the Old South disappear one night."

Thanks to the town's beloved doctor, L.M. Tye, the area was spared much of Sherman's wrath in 1864 after Tye treated several Union soldiers. According to local history, only one house was destroyed.

WHAT WE LOVE

This is a town that thrives on retro: The welcome center on the main square occupies a 1920s-era Standard Oil service station, complete with period gas pumps. Chevy's, a 1950s-style burger joint offers fried dill pickles, Rock-a-Billy's Grilled Chicken, and the Whiz Kids Philly Cheesesteak. Bell, Book & Candle, a used and rare bookstore, is located in a historic 5,000-square-foot building just off the town square and offers more than 200,000 volumes, along with craft items. The store also maintains a café, hosts readings and book signings, and is the starting point for the McDonough Haunted History Tour, offered every other Saturday.

DON'T MISS

GEORGIA INDEPENDENCE DAY FESTIVAL & FIREWORKS
JULY 3-4
A weekend-long party at the historic Nash Farm, including colonial music and dancing, crafts, a wagon parade, and a military

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parade honoring soldiers from the Revolution to the present day. And after sunset, fireworks, of course.

FALL FESTIVAL AND CHILI COOK-OFF ON THE SQUARE
OCTOBER 23
This annual event brings hungry crowds and some serious chili cooks to the square in downtown McDonough. Everyone eats well, and prizes are awarded to judge and crowd favorites.

GERANIUM FESTIVAL
MAY 21, 2011
McDonough is home to Oglevee Limited, said to be the largest geranium grower in the country, and the town has come to be known as the Geranium City. This popular festival, organized by the local Lions Club, celebrates the flower and features music, food, and a host of vendors.

SANDY SPRINGS CVB

SANDY SPRINGS CVB

Sandy Springs

ROOTS

During the Civil War, Union troops crossed the Chattahoochee near Sope Creek. Wealthy Atlantans built second homes here in the 1920s, but the community really took off in the building boom following World War II.

A movement to incorporate Sandy Springs began in the 1970s when the city of Atlanta tried to annex the community. In 2005 residents voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to incorporate. Sandy Springs became the first new city in Georgia in fifty years and the third-largest city to incorporate in the United States. Sandy Springs has a unique government structure: It is almost totally privatized, with the government directly employing only the police and fire department.

WHAT WE LOVE

Sandy Springs' location at the intersection of two main highways, Interstate 285 and Georgia Highway 400, makes it an ideal location for several significant businesses including UPS and Porsche North America. It is also home to the largest concentration of hospitals in the Atlanta area.

This spring the town became the new home for the exhibit *Anne Frank in the World*, which details the story of Anne Frank from her childhood in the 1930s to the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and her death in 1945. The display is housed in the second floor suite at 5920 Roswell Road, above the Sandy Springs Hospitality & Tourism Welcome Center.

The town is also home to a large, thriving Persian community and a wealth of restaurants featuring Persian cuisine. The best is Rumi's Kitchen on Roswell Road. The Sandy Springs Farmers Market convenes every Saturday morning from May through August at Sandy Springs Circle and Johnson Ferry Road.

DON'T MISS

THIRD ANNUAL CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER SUMMER SPLASH
JULY 31
Take a six-mile journey down the Chattahoochee River in a kayak, canoe, or raft. Enjoy music, food, and fun at Powers Island then catch a free shuttle back to your car.

SANDY SPRINGS FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 25-26
This popular local celebration features 5K and 10K races, a pet parade, an antiques appraiser, music, and food.

GLOBAL BMW SANDY SPRINGS CYCLING CHALLENGE
MAY 1, 2011
Downtown Sandy Springs will be transformed into an international cycling competition arena. Olympians and internationally ranked athletes will take to the streets to contest the series, as well as qualifying positions for the USA CRITS Finals.

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Decatur

ROOTS

Founded in 1823 at the intersection of two Native American trails (one of which is now Clairmont Road), Decatur is named for Commodore Stephen Decatur Jr., a hero of the War of 1812. It is the second-oldest municipality in the Atlanta metropolitan area and the seat of DeKalb County. Over the years, the courthouse square came to serve as a community gathering place. Today it continues to be the focus of festivals and special events and serves as the heart of the community.

It is said that early residents rejected a proposal by the Western and Atlantic Railroad to make Decatur a major stop on its new line in the 1830s. So the railroad moved seven miles west to a small settlement called Terminus. In 1843, that settlement was renamed Marthasville and two years later became Atlanta.

WHAT WE LOVE

On summer evenings, dogs, babies, and Frisbee players frolic on the lawns around the courthouse square. Music wafts through open doors. It's the picture of contented, small-town America, with two big differences. Decatur is Hipster City—referred to by some as the Berkeley of the South—so you'll see every permutation of family at the communal party. And it's inside the Perimeter, fifteen minutes from downtown.

The town has five historic districts and is also home to Watershed, the iconic restaurant owned by Indigo Girl Emily Saliers and her partners and featuring locally grown, organic ingredients. One of the town's proudest institutions is the DeKalb Farmers Market. What began as a modest produce stand in 1977 now occupies an enormous 140,000-square-foot building. The market, devoted to fresh produce and just about anything edible, serves up to 100,000 customers a week

Hometown Agnes Scott College and nearby Emory University lend Decatur the energy and verve of a hip college town.

DON'T MISS

DECATUR BOOK FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 3-5

This is the largest independent book festival in the country and brings thousands of participants to the square for book

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signings, readings, an interactive children's area, live music, cooking demonstrations, poetry slams, and writing workshops.

DECATUR CRAFT BEER TASTING FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 16
Taste more than 100 of the finest local, American, and international beers, and enjoy live music and food from local restaurants.

DECATUR HOLIDAY CANDLELIGHT TOUR OF HOMES
DECEMBER 4–5
Tour beautiful Decatur homes and points of interest during this charming holiday tradition.

East Point

ROOTS

East Point—so named because it was the easternmost point reached by the Atlanta & West Railroad—was settled in 1870 by sixteen families. It received its charter in 1887 and grew quickly; by 1880 it had a railway, gristmills, a government distillery, churches, schools, a steam gin, a telegraph office, and its own newspaper. East Point soon ranked as a grain and cotton-growing center, and with its pleasant climate and proximity to the railway, it also became a popular summer resort. By 1892, Main Street was completed.

From the late 1930s through the 1950s, East Point became a sought-after suburb of Atlanta, offering large lots and affordable prices. Today, its proximity to downtown Atlanta and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport continue to contribute to its growth. East Point is also the gateway to the Fort McPherson Army base.

CITY OF EAST POINT

WHAT WE LOVE

East Point is an unusually diverse community that attracts young families and professionals to its restored downtown lofts and well-established neighborhoods. While some areas of the city have gone through tough times in recent years, East Point has bounced back. Camp Creek Marketplace, a huge new shopping center, has opened on the city's western side, and new residents have bought and renovated many of the World War II–era homes. The Jefferson Park neighborhood has applied for historic district status.

East Point is the home of the Dick Lane Velodrome, built in 1974. A 1/5-mile, steeply banked concrete track for bicycle racing, the velodrome is located in Sumner Park. The East Point Velodrome Association conducts activities for children, including the Bicycle Little League, summer camps, and bicycle-safety clinics.

DON'T MISS

SALUTE TO THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE
JULY 4
One of the best Fourth of July celebrations in the metro area, in addition to the live entertainment and an impressive fireworks show, this annual extravaganza includes a full carnival featuring a Ferris wheel, carousel, dunk tanks, funnel cakes, cotton candy, and much, much more.

DESTINATION EAST POINT
OCTOBER 2
This annual day-long fall festival on Main Street, across from the East Point MARTA station, features great music, food, arts and crafts, face painters, strolling musicians, stilt walkers, a dog show, inflatables, balloons, and more.

TASTE OF EAST POINT
MAY 7, 2011
Enjoy the local flavor of East Point. In addition to trying samples of dishes prepared by local restaurants, visitors get a taste of the city's cultural offerings. Local artists display and sell their work, and local musicians perform at the event.

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Braselton

ROOTS

In 1884 John O. Braselton settled with his family in northeast Georgia, but it wasn't until 1916 that Braselton received a sanctioned charter from the state and formed a municipal government. Every member of the Town Council was named Braselton, a distinction that eventually earned the town a mention in Ripley's Believe It or Not!

John O. Braselton's three sons followed him into the family business, the Braselton Brothers Store. More than a store, the two-story brick building housed a bank and a feed-and-seed outlet, as well as a grocery and dry goods store. For many decades it served as the town's social and cultural center; now it houses the Braselton Antique Mall.

In 1950, according to the U.S. Census, the town had a population of 150. Helped by its current location on Interstate 85, it has grown significantly since then to a town of 2,500. In 1989, actress Kim Basinger, along with the Ameritech Pension Fund, bought the entire town from the Braselton family for $20 million, hoping to establish a tourist destination with a film festival and movie studios. She eventually sold out to Ameritech, which still owns much of the town, along with the developer Wayne Mason.

The town of Braselton spans four counties: Hall, Gwinnett, Barrow, and Jackson.

WHAT WE LOVE

Known for its historic downtown, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, Braselton is a mecca for antique lovers. It's also the site of Chateau Elan winery and resort and Road Atlanta. Chateau Elan's 3,500 acres include a spa, an equestrian center, a championship golf course, tennis and swim facilities, and a culinary studio. Established on a 750-acre plot in 1969, Road Atlanta's 2.55-mile, twelve-turn track hosts a variety of automobile and motorcycle races, including the annual Petit Le Mans. It is also a site for the famous Skip Barber Racing School.

Braselton is the home of Thompson Mills Forest, Georgia's official state arboretum. The seven-acre Eva Thompson Thornton Garden contains more than 100 ornamental trees from around the world. The forest itself contains 90 percent of Georgia's native tree species.

The giant Mayfield Dairy conducts factory tours and offers all the ice cream you can eat for $2.50.

DON'T MISS

YEARONE'S BRASELTON BASH
JULY 17, AUGUST 21, SEPTEMBER 18, OCTOBER 16, NOVEMBER 13
This family event showcases the classic rides of the '50s and '60s, with prizes awarded by YearOne, the local company that specializes in restoring and selling these dream machines.

PETIT LE MANS
SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 2
A European-style endurance race featuring futuristic racing

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prototypes, the Petit Le Mans runs around the twisty Road Atlanta track for 1,000 miles or ten hours, whichever comes first. Bring your earplugs!

FALL ANTIQUE & GARDENING FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 23-24
Antiques, collectibles, garden supplies, plants, trees, furnishings, and much more are featured in the park—a great opportunity to do some early holiday shopping.

Helen

ROOTS

In 1828, gold was discovered on Dukes Creek in Nacoochee Valley, and the Gold Rush lasted through most of the century. By the early 1900s, the virgin timber was being exploited. During this time, the Gainesville and Northwestern Railroad followed the Chattahoochee River through the area, and in 1913 the valley was named after the surveyor's daughter, Helen. Logging operations continued until all the timber was used up, and the town was all but abandoned by the 1960s.

In 1968, inspired by a local artist who had been stationed in Germany, the town reinvented itself as a Bavarian-style village. Tourism is now the enchanting mountain town's main industry, and the classic half-timber style is mandatory for all buildings.

WHAT WE LOVE

Helen seems to attract the quirky and clever. Case in point: Ain't B's Bakery and Café ("Home of the 'Heavenly Fried Pies'").

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest and the spectacular double Anna Ruby Falls are close by. Chattahoochee Stables offers scenic trail rides along the Chattahoochee River, and Cool River Tubing provides a more direct (and wetter) route from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend.

The Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia in nearby Sautee displays beautiful examples of this quintessential Southern grassroots art form, from a Native American bowl dating from the 1400s to the work of local modern artisans.

DON'T MISS

BUZZ IN THE BLUE RIDGE CHAINSAW CARVING EXTRAVAGANZA
JULY 17-18
It bills itself as "the only event in the North Georgia Mountains this summer that combines the speed & sound of a motor-cross with the skill and accuracy of a brain surgeon." Irresistible.

OKTOBERFEST
SEPTEMBER 9-OCTOBER 31
That's a loooong festival. Helen claims it's the longest-running Oktoberfest in the country. Enjoy polka dancing, beer, bratwurst, and, of course, oompah bands.

38TH ANNUAL HELEN TO THE ATLANTIC BALLOON RACE & FESTIVAL
JUNE 2–4, 2011
The only long-distance hot-air balloon race in the United States and the South's oldest balloon event begins with a mass ascension of thirty colorful hot-air balloons. The race starts in Helen, and the finish line is I-95, anywhere between Maine and Miami. The shortest distance is 225 miles, and the race usually takes two days.

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Peachtree City

CITY OF PEACHTREE CITY

ROOTS

Officially founded in 1959, two years after Flat Creek was dammed to create Lake Peachtree, Peachtree City is one of Georgia's newer towns. It grew from a collection of farming lands known as Aberdeen, Kedron, and Shakerag.

In 1965, a volunteer fire department was formed, along with a one-car police department, and an elementary school was opened. By 1975 the city was named "one of America's best suburbs" by *Ladies Home Journal*—but it wasn't until the next year that the town got its own telephone exchange, and it took another three years before the first traffic light was installed. McIntosh High School opened in 1981. Today, Peachtree City has more than 35,000 residents.

WHAT WE LOVE

One of the town's unique offerings is its extensive system of golf-cart paths that afford access to almost anywhere inside the city limits. Many businesses have special golf-cart parking spaces, and the police department even has several golf carts to patrol the paths. The paths also provide a safe alternative to roads for cyclists, joggers, and pedestrians.

The regional airport, Falcon Field, is the location for the National Weather Service radar station and Weather Forecast Office that serve northern and central Georgia. The airport is also home to the Falcon Field Veterans Memorial, which features a mounted Air Force F-16 "Fighting Falcon" jet fighter, a Military Walk of Honor, and a brick-paver recognition area honoring those that have contributed to preserving our freedom.

In July 2005 and 2009, CNN/Money and *Money* magazine ranked Peachtree City eighth on its list of the 100 Best Places to Live in the United States.

DON'T MISS

2010 INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION
JULY 3
Begin the day with the all-American parade and see it to a close with fireworks at dusk. Bonus: Many residents deck out their signature golf carts in red, white, and blue in honor of the Fourth, lending the entire town a merry, madcap feel.

CITY OF PEACHTREE CITY

FAYETTE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING DERBY
AUGUST 21
The derby, which takes place at Luther Glass Park on Peachtree Parkway South, is open to kids between the ages of six and twelve. Admission is free, but pre-registration is a required.

THE GREAT GEORGIA AIRSHOW
OCTOBER 9-10
Precision parachuting, gravity-defying jets, thundering jet trucks, and vintage warbirds wow visitors at Falcon Field.

Perry

ROOTS

Originally named Wattsville, the town was founded in 1823 and soon changed its name to honor the War of 1812 hero Commodore Perry. It was incorporated by the Georgia General Assembly in 1824. Originally the city limit was a mile-wide circle, except for the northern boundary, which was formed by Big Indian Creek.

For much of its early history Perry was a mill town, producing cotton, lumber, and flour. In 1920, US Highway 41 was paved, and the New Perry Hotel became a popular stop on the way to Florida. Still more commerce came to the town with the

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opening of Interstate 75 in the 1960s. In 1990, the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter opened, bringing with it the annual Georgia National Fair.

WHAT WE LOVE

Downtown Perry is a wonderful place to wander. In addition to its plethora of antique shops (it's part of Georgia's Antiques Trail), the historic Board of Education building has an exhibit devoted to former U.S. senator and native son Sam Nunn.

Henderson Village, eight miles south of town, is a resort housed in historic buildings and includes gardens with tropical birds, carriage rides, an event center, and a gourmet restaurant.

The Museum of Aviation boasts a collection of historic aircraft dating from World War I to the present, including a recently retired SR-71 "Blackbird" spy plane. There's also an IMAX aviation theater and a gift shop. Admission is free.

DON'T MISS

PERRY BUCKARAMA
AUGUST 20-22
Sponsored by the Georgia Wildlife Federation and held at the Georgia National Fairgrounds, this show features the latest in hunting and outdoor sports products. All proceeds go to support the Wildlife Federation's educational programs.

CITY OF PERRY

GEORGIA NATIONAL FAIR
OCTOBER 7-17
This is definitely the biggest event in Perry; last year it attracted more than 400,000 visitors. It includes all the features of a traditional state fair: livestock exhibitions and horse shows, entertainment, amusement rides, and domestic and fine arts competitions. Gate admission is free.

CITY OF PERRY

MOSSY CREEK BARNYARD FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 16-17, 2010 AND APRIL 16-17, 2011
This celebration of Southern traditional crafts, from wooden-decoy carving to rug making, also features bluegrass and gospel music, dancing, storytelling, and bullwhip cracking.

Roswell

GEORGIA NATIONAL FAIRGROUNDS & AGRICENTER

ROOTS

In 1830 Roswell King, a plantation manager from St. Simons Island, passed through the area. He believed that Vickery Creek could provide power for a mill and that nearby land would be good for growing cotton. With the help of wealthy coastal families, he soon established the biggest cotton mill in north Georgia.

In the mid-1800s the county seat at Marietta was a four-hour ride away, so the community at Roswell presented a charter to the Georgia General Assembly to incorporate the town. It was approved in 1854.

Roswell was captured by Union forces during the Civil War. By then the mill workers were mostly Scots-Irish women. Under Sherman's orders, the mills were burned and

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the workers shipped north.

During the Great Depression, Roswell was ceded to an expanding Fulton County. The town got its first traffic light in 1949 at the intersection of Sloan and Atlanta streets.

WHAT WE LOVE

Now one of the largest cities in Georgia, Roswell, at its center, still has the feel of a small town. And it continues to evolve. Canton Street, its main thoroughfare, has antique stores and boutiques, and with the recent addition of some hip new restaurants, it has begun attracting a younger crowd. Check out Inc. Street Food, with its array Latin American cuisines, and the Salt Factory, an inviting English-style pub offering outstanding modern comfort food and brew. The independently owned Roswell Bookstore on Alpharetta Highway carries more than 100,000 new and used books.

Barrington Hall, Smith Plantation, and Bulloch Hall, the homes of the original Roswell families, have been lovingly restored and are now owned by the City of Roswell. All are open to the public. Bulloch Hall was the childhood home of President Theodore Roosevelt's mother, Mittie Bulloch.

DON'T MISS

GREAT CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER PAINT OUT
AUGUST 11-14

Artists paint for three days, inspired by the landscape of the Chattahoochee River. The event concludes with a public reception, exhibition of works, and awards.

ROSWELL CVB

ROSWELL CVB

THE 2ND ANNUAL TRILOGY TROLLEY CRAWL
AUGUST 21

Tour Roswell's trio of great historic homes—Barrington Hall, Bulloch Hall, and Smith Plantation—and learn about the history of the American South from 1838 to present on this enchanting evening tour.

TASTE OF ROSWELL
OCTOBER 16

This is a great way to enjoy a day in the historic town square while sampling amazing offerings from Roswell's favorite restaurants. Throw in some oldies and live music and you have a great recipe for fall fun.

ROSWELL CVB

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Mother Nature

Continued from page 74

and one that, he thinks, will pay dividends. He's staked his career on it.

AT 7:15 ON THE MORNING AFTER the Haiti earthquake, MNN managing editor Emily Murphy sent an e-mail to her colleagues: *Is there an environmental angle we should look at?* With a full-time staff of twenty, Mother Nature Network can't compete with breaking news organizations such as CNN or MSNBC. It doesn't try to. But it does try to reflect that coverage, so Murphy and staff pulled stories and photos from the Associated Press, embedded a *Today Show* clip on the home page, and set to work on an originally reported, in-depth presentation of the science behind earthquakes. The piece was classic MNN: cleanly written, attractive graphics, potentially reusable for the next earthquake. With a year and a half under its belt, MNN remains ever mindful of resources.

Depending on your tastes, the site's content is either oddly disparate or appealingly diverse. On a given day readers might find an update on the oil spill cleanup in the Gulf of Mexico, a story about an obese skunk with a bacon addiction, and green-living tips from celebrities. (In one memorable video clip, Christina Applegate recommends buying bamboo towels while Amy Poehler advises drying yourself with your own hair.) They might peruse installments of "Translating Uncle Sam," in which ungainly governmental data is rendered in plain language, or update their profile on the MNN Community social network, or watch full-length episodes of *Captain Planet*, the eco-themed animated series resurrected from the archives of Turner Broadcasting System. It's not exactly the environmental *Mother Jones*. "We try and do things that have a certain optimism, that very much feel like you can effect change," says Hope Dlugozima, MNN's vice president of community and social networking. "It's kind of like the readership of *Real Simple*. Do everything you would normally do—cook, buy clothes—but just do it a little more consciously."

Such advice ranges from the strictly blasé (energy-efficient lawn equipment) to the risqué (hand-cranked sex toys). The site's sheer range of material is one of its most defining traits. "The fact that we don't have 'green' in our name allows us to cover subjects like caring for kids, camping, bicycling, astronomy," says Babbit. "These are subjects that may not be pigeonholed as strictly environmental, but that's where we see our future—social responsibility as a whole." That the name sounds like CNN is purely accidental. Babbit forked over $100,000 to a New Jersey business owner for the rights to MNN.com after an acquaintance, Turner Enterprises president Taylor Glover, pointed out that Mother Nature Network would make for an unwieldy URL.

MNN.com officially launched in January 2009, after five months of planning in a windowless space on the thirty-third floor of 191 Peachtree Tower. Among the first hired: managing editor Murphy, a Westminster Schools alum who has worked at *USA Today*, *National Geographic*, and CNN; and content director Benyamin Cohen, founder of now defunct *American Jewish Life* magazine and author of *My Jesus Year: A Rabbi's Son Wan-*

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THIS MAN IS NOT ANDREW DICE CLAY
Atlanta magazine profiled Babbit in September 1992, shortly after he became chief marketing officer for Mayor Maynard Jackson. The writer depicted Babbit as a hotshot and an "enfant terrible."

ders the Bible Belt in Search of His Own Faith. Today, their green-walled newsroom on the fortieth floor of 191 Peachtree Tower is full of natural light and unnaturally devoid of conversation. Says Cohen, "Every time I make a phone call, I close my door because I don't want to make noise. I guess it's a very 2010 thing, all of us sitting here with our headphones on, instant messaging each other."

Behind the scenes, though, the content machine is humming. Cohen presides over about fifty nonstaff contributors around the country who churn out quick-turnaround stories or write longer-form columns and features. Typical rates vary between twenty and thirty-five cents a word—a rate below what many freelance journalists will accept. There are eight featured bloggers and eighty-five college "correspondents" who report on news in their home states. Thanks in part to the languishing journalism industry, Babbit was able to enlist top talent early, including the former executive producer of CNN's science department, Peter Dykstra, who contributed articles and serves on MNN's advisory board; former *Creative Loafing* editor Ken Edelstein, who pens the weekly "Planet Pundit" column; and *New York Times* contributor Jim Motavalli, who authors MNN's transportation blog.

Nonjournalist heavyweights also permeate the ranks, culled from Babbit and Leavell's collective Rolodex. Atlanta resident Vanessa Vadim, environmental consultant and daughter of Jane Fonda, sits on the advisory board and wrote an advice column. Alexandra Cousteau, filmmaker and granddaughter of deep-sea explorer Jacques Cousteau, recently joined the board of directors and shares content from her independently produced series on water resources, *Expedition: Blue Planet*. James Berrien, who recently stepped down after a decade as publisher and president of *Forbes*, is MNN's president; he maintains a New York address to be close to advertisers.

The face of Mother Nature Network, though, is Leavell. Besides contributing a share of the startup funds, Leavell came on staff as director of environmental affairs, which is a fancy way of saying he does a bit of everything: making sales calls and promotional appearances, interviewing fellow

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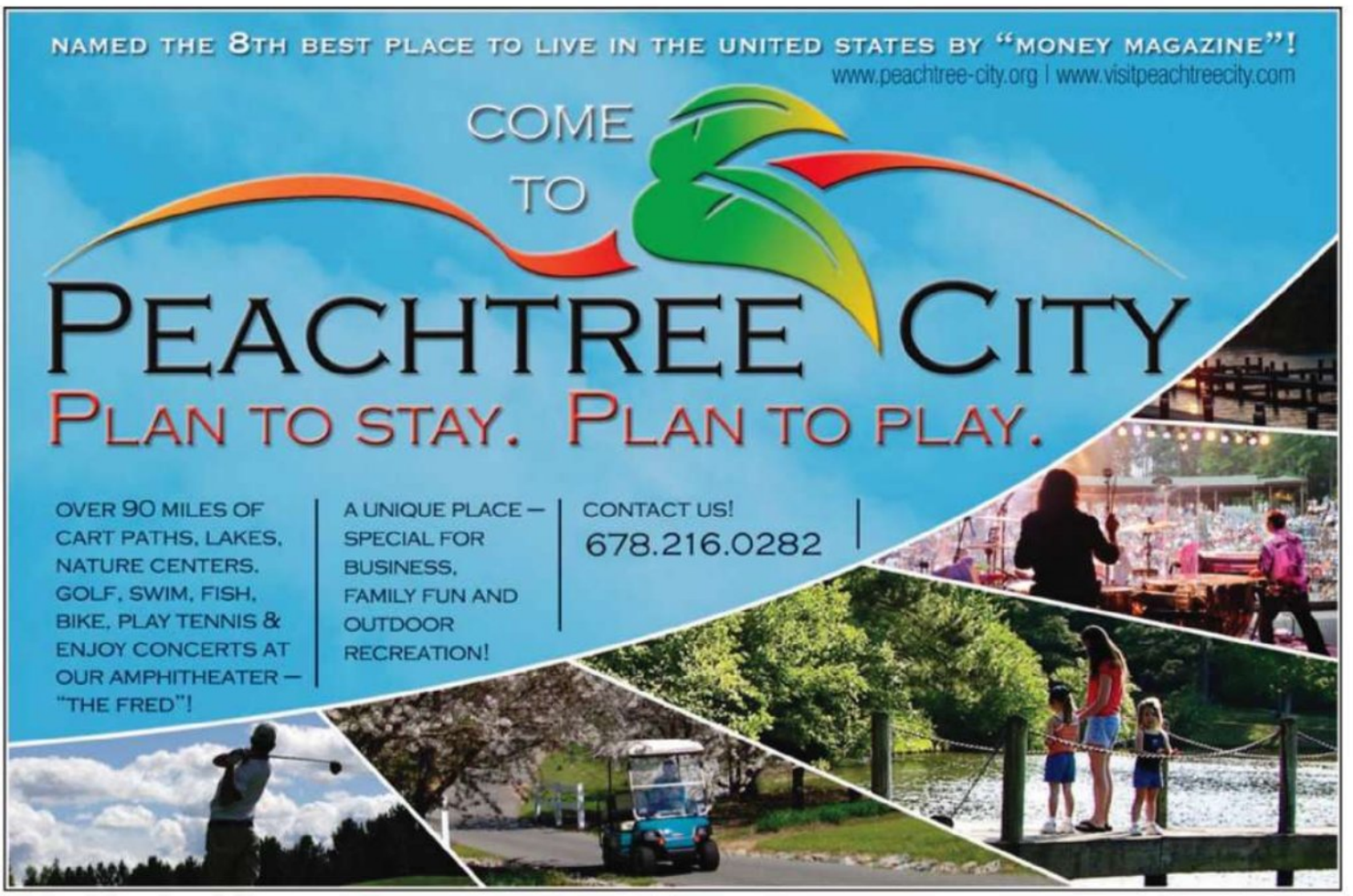
musicians in an editorial segment called "In the Green Room," voting on strategic business decisions. For all the founding board members' combined expertise on raising capital and generating a profit, Leavell's the one with environmental chops. The owner of a 2,200-acre pine plantation near Macon, he routinely engages with lawmakers on matters of forestry and lent his expertise to the last two Congressional farm bills. He has written two books on tree farming and is working on a third about sustainable growth and development in American communities.

More than any of his fellow stakeholders, Leavell's interest in MNN transcends the financial. Seated in his office in 191, where classic rock memorabilia adorns the walls, he explains in a soft-edged Southern accent: "The sleeping giant is awakening. People have started to get it and say, 'Do we only have a limited time to turn our planet around? And if that's true, what do we need to do?' That's what we're trying to do at MNN—be a resource for people so they can make these changes. I'm a father, a grandfather now. I want to pass on to my heirs a world where they can enjoy the things I enjoy—walking out in that forest and breathing in the fresh air and seeing the deer and turkey and songbirds."

WHEN JOEL BABBIT WAS A KID in the sixties, American advertising became funnier, livelier, and more creative. "Think small," urged the Volkswagen Beetle. "Betcha can't eat just one," dared Lay's potato chips. Babbit, born and raised in Druid Hills, was a devoted consumer before he had any spending power. He admired the artists who would come to define the era in advertising: Norman Rockwell, George Lois, Andy Warhol. By thirteen he knew his calling. He declared an advertising major in the first quarter of his freshman year at the University of Georgia.

By age thirty-three Babbit had opened his own agency, striking off with another young player on the Atlanta ad scene, a Manhattan transplant named Joey Reiman. They flipped a coin to see whose name would come first, and Babbit & Reiman was born. "We thought of ourselves as Batman and Robin, Lennon and McCartney," recalls Reiman, who today heads Atlanta's BrightHouse consulting firm. "We both believed we could accomplish anything in the world. We had an unflappable and unswerving confidence." They also had nerve. They netted one of their first clients, Rich's department stores, when they were just a company of two working out of Reiman's apartment; they held the meeting at a restaurant and paid waiters to pose as staff. They won the Days Inn account by arranging for a sign-wearing camel to greet the company's president, Mike Leven, outside his hotel in Israel. *Mike, we're busting our humps for you back in Atlanta*. Their campaigns were as creative as their pitches, and they frequently needed—and one year brought—a shopping cart to tote their winnings from the Atlanta Ad Club's Addy competition. In 1988, when Babbit was thirty-five, they sold Babbit & Reiman to now defunct London firm GGT for what would amount to about $7.5 million, cementing their fortunes. The agency continued to operate under the same name until 1991, when Babbit left to head the New York office of ad firm Chiat/Day.

In 1992, he took a substantial pay cut to



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serve as Maynard Jackson's chief marketing officer; he was eager to return to his hometown as it geared up to host the Olympics. During his yearlong tenure under Jackson, Babbit's colorful ideas were not always well received—and sometimes they weren't even real ideas—but they added to his mystique. Two oft-told stories from this time include the one about beaming ads from outer space—true insofar as Babbit met with a company called Space Marketing to discuss running ads on the side of "space balloons"—and one in which he proposed printing corporate logos on stray dogs, which was a joke he told a reporter friend that ended up in the next day's *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Babbit was entirely serious, however, about a proposal to lease naming rights of Atlanta streets and parks to corporations. The idea got plenty of buzz—groused then councilman Bill Campbell to the *New York Times*, "We'll just become Coca-Colaville"—but never gained traction. To this day Babbit thinks it would work. "People thought it was commercial and crass, but given the choice between having more policemen and teachers and giving up the name Piedmont [Park], which would you prefer?" he says.

He could present a similar hypothetical to any die-hard, granola environmentalist who winces at MNN's list of megacorporate sponsors—corporations such as Aflac, Pfizer, Clorox, Dell, Southern Company, Coca-Cola, and MillerCoors. Indeed, MNN's raison d'etre is awkwardly twofold—an environmental news site built in service of corporate advertising, if you're Babbit, or the other way around, if you're Leavell. But should the website be successful, perhaps Babbit's greatest accomplishment will be that he's found a way to obtain the dollars without undermining the message.

Sitting at his desk one afternoon, he clicks through MNN's pages like a proud father flicking through the photos in his wallet. "For all the talk of being high-tech, most Internet companies still sell ads the way a newspaper did 100 years ago: by the inch, by the day, in rotation with 100 other companies," he explains. He calls them NASCAR jackets—websites on which logos pop on and off seemingly at random, vying for attention. MNN, in contrast, is built around a sponsorship model that's easy on the eye and, he thinks, effective. The content is divided into thirty-five "channels" with themes such as politics, fashion, computers, or cooking. Companies pay $300,000 to be the sole marketing presence on a given channel and all the pages within it for a year; included in the cost are six promotional boxes for interactive content such as videos and blogs as well as a share of the traditional display ads used sparingly throughout the site.

The result is that MNN has a distinctly corporate feel. There is a specific channel for building products (sponsored by Georgia-Pacific), for instance, and one channel for beer and another for "wine and spirits" (sponsored by MillerCoors and Brown-Forman, respectively). And it can be jarring to read an article about clean energy alongside an advertisement for Southern Company, which, according to the Center for Global Development, operates the country's top three CO_2-emitting power plants. But Babbit insists sponsors don't influence editorial decisions. Asked if MNN would hesitate to cover news that implicates an advertiser, he says: "Every

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sponsor we've ever called on has asked us that question. They say, 'Look, we try and do the right thing, but if by mistake something was to occur that involved us, are you telling me it's possible that story would be on the page we are sponsoring?' I say not only is it possible, it *will* happen. But if we lose our credibility, we are worthless to everyone."

Given that muckraking is not MNN's mission, corporations can feel reasonably secure on MNN's pages while staking a presence within an increasingly meaningful niche. Says Chris Womack, executive vice president of Southern Company: "[MNN] is a great platform to disseminate messaging about what Southern Company's doing on an environmental front—new initiatives, new programs, what's happening in the marketplace." Adds Bill Frerking, vice president and chief sustainability officer for Georgia-Pacific (a position created in 2007): "We look at MNN as a forum to not only message about our sustainability stories but also get feedback on what people are saying about the issues. The fact is there's going to be content on there we may not always agree with, but that's one of the things that makes it attractive to us."

MNN broke about even in its first year but is poised to make a profit in its second, Babbit says. Monthly visits, a vital stat to advertisers, are surging. This March, MNN surpassed 1 million visits for the first time, up from about 800,000 the month before. Out of the 6,000-some environmental websites tracked by Alexa, the Amazon-owned website-ranking service, MNN's rank as of May was sixth—behind nonprofit site Care2 and three governmental sites. The only higher-ranked for-profit site was the environmental subsite of Britain's *Guardian*; MNN outperformed Hearst's Daily Green and Discovery's Planet Green.

Readers are just one ingredient in the cocktail, of course. The *New York Times*' website attracts some 17 million readers a month in the United States, but with advertising revenue in a two-year decline, the *Times*' executives made the polarizing decision earlier this year to charge a fee to frequent visitors, effective 2011. Babbit is watching this experiment with interest; its success or failure could shape the future of online news consumption. So could the iPad, for that matter, or any of the "digital newsstand" companies that have cropped up to broker the download of multiple publications. The ad model Babbit developed for MNN is just one permutation in the industry-wide puzzle of how to make a news site profitable.

Environmental purists might criticize MNN for the fundamental weirdness it represents: a green news site built as an engine for corporate advertising. They might lament that Mother Nature's champion is an ad man, her cause boiled down to a bottom line. But if Babbit and his friends have calculated correctly, MNN will be a rare model of sustainability in a medium defined by uncertainty, in an industry that must evolve to survive. So long as its sponsors sign and renew their lucrative contracts, MNN's editorial staff will get paid, even grow, and continue to generate stories about organic towels, electric cars, and earthquakes. And Joel Babbit will sit in his office on the fortieth floor of 191 Peachtree Tower, which looks out over Downtown Atlanta and the yellow haze of surrounding sprawl, and he will see that it is good. ■

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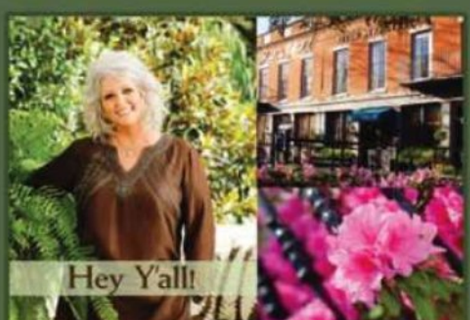

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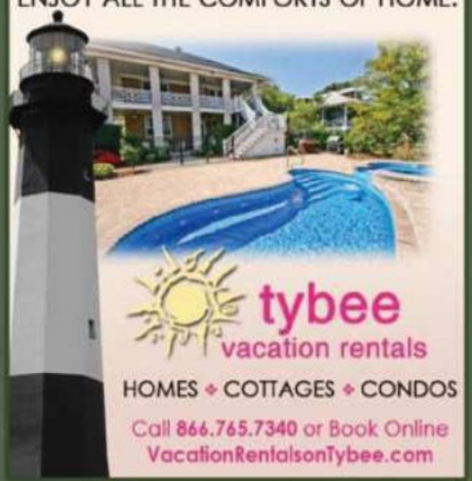

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THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

Breast milk is the best food for most babies. It contains the nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth and development during the first six months of life, as well as substances that help protect baby from many illnesses. Breast milk is easy to digest, so your baby may have less gas and discomfort than a formula-fed baby. Studies show that breastfed babies are less likely than formula-fed babies to have ear infections, lower-respiratory infections (such as pneumonia and bronchiolitis), meningitis, urinary tract infections, and diarrhea. Studies also suggest that breastfed babies may be less likely than formula-fed babies to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

For mother, breastfeeding also provides health benefits, including an earlier return to her pre-pregnancy weight, decrease in the likelihood of osteoporosis later in life, and a special bond that develops between baby and mother during breastfeeding.

While the decision to breastfeed is a very personal one, the March of Dimes urges all new mothers to breastfeed if they are able. Breastfeeding is recommended for the vast majority of mothers and babies. However, there are a few rare exceptions, and you should discuss any chronic health conditions, medications, and other issues that may affect your decision to breastfeed. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that a baby be breastfed for at least twelve months. However, even babies who breastfeed for only a short period of time experience health benefits.

Source: marchofdimes.com

Northside Hospital's Guide to Preparing to Breastfeed

Your breasts have been preparing to feed your baby since you conceived, growing larger as milk-making structures develop within them. Since the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy, your breasts have been able to produce milk for your baby.

You may have already noticed beads of deep yellow fluid on your nipples. This "liquid gold" is colostrum, your baby's first food, and it usually appears sometime in the third trimester. If you nurse your baby early and often in the first days after birth, the colostrum will soon turn to mature milk, tailor-made to provide your baby with all the nutrients he needs until he is five to six months old, and beyond.

The two best breastfeeding preparations during pregnancy are:

1. Identify the people who will support and encourage you while breastfeeding your baby. Encourage your mother (grandmother of the baby) to go to a grandparenting class and learn the latest and most up-to-date information on breastfeeding and baby care.

2. Be sure that you and your partner attend a class taught by an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant to get balanced, accurate breastfeeding information. Your class will answer questions such as:

- How do I prevent sore nipples?
- How do I know my baby is receiving enough milk?
- Under what circumstances should I begin using a breast pump?

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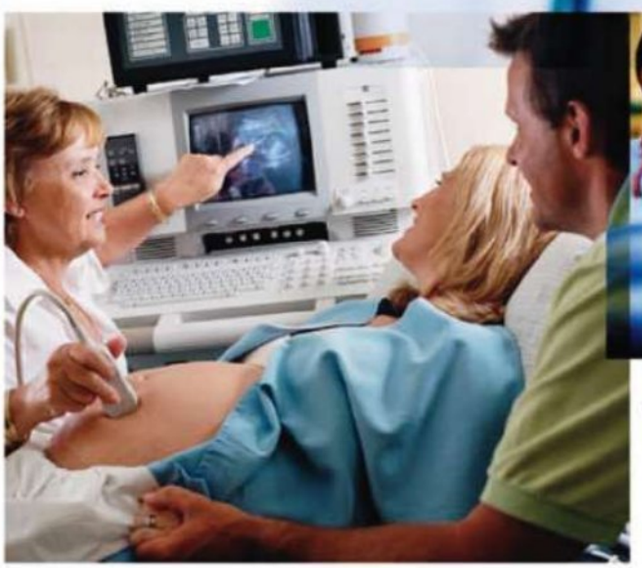

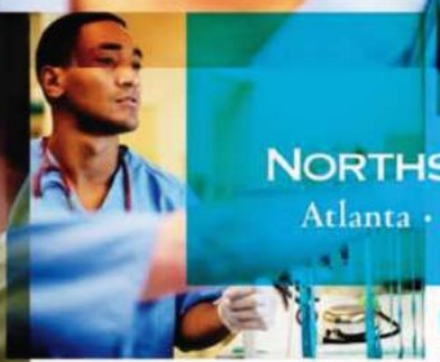

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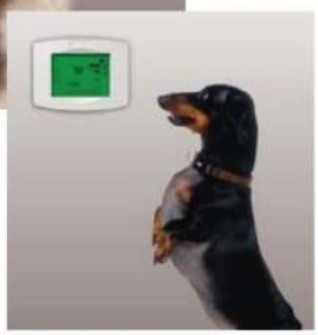

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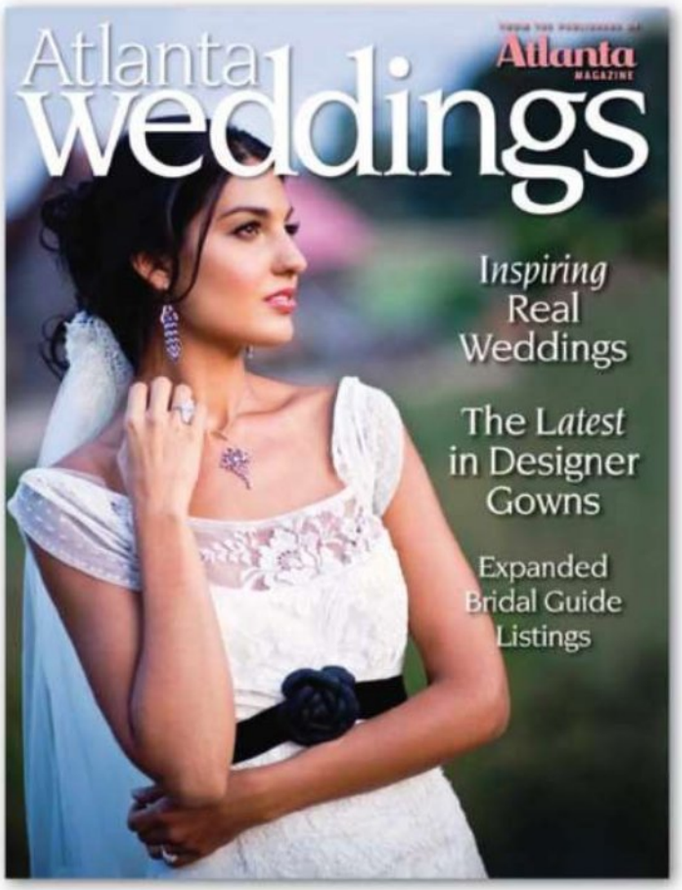

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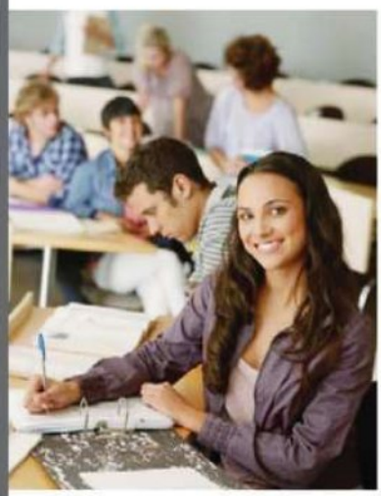

Students looking for a more personal approach to education may find the answer at Argosy University, Atlanta. This leading institution offers a variety of degree programs that focus on the human side of success alongside professional competence. All graduate and undergraduate programs (and there are over twenty to choose from) emphasize interpersonal skills as well as academic learning.

Students can pursue graduate degrees in the College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, the College of Business, and the College of Education. Undergraduate degrees in Business, Criminal Justice, Liberal Arts, and Psychology are offered in the College of Undergraduate Studies.

Our supportive educational environment and flexible class options enable students to earn a degree while fulfilling other life responsibilities. All of our programs are oriented to the real working world and feature dynamic curricula delivered in flexible class formats that make it easy to pursue a degree while meeting family and professional demands.

All of our programs are taught by practicing professionals who bring real-world experience into the classroom. Each curriculum is built around the understanding that strong interpersonal skills are as important as academic achievement. The philosophy at Argosy University, Atlanta is that being able to interact effectively with other people is as important to career development as anything else you can learn in the classroom.

Along with the advantages of traditional learning methods, the school offers the flexibility of online formats to accommodate the hectic schedules of busy working students. Students can choose to take many courses on-ground, blended, or fully online. Evening and weekend classes provide another level of flexibility in many programs.

Argosy University, Atlanta is located in the city of Sandy Springs, at 980 Hammond Drive, Suite 100. The school offers easy access to neighboring colleges and universities, and is close to a variety of local libraries, restaurants, theaters, and art museums.

There's also a wide range of financial aid options for students who qualify. Argosy University accepts students year-round on a rolling admissions basis, depending on availability of required courses. Applications and additional information are available online at argosy.edu/atlanta or by contacting the campus at 1-888-671-4777.

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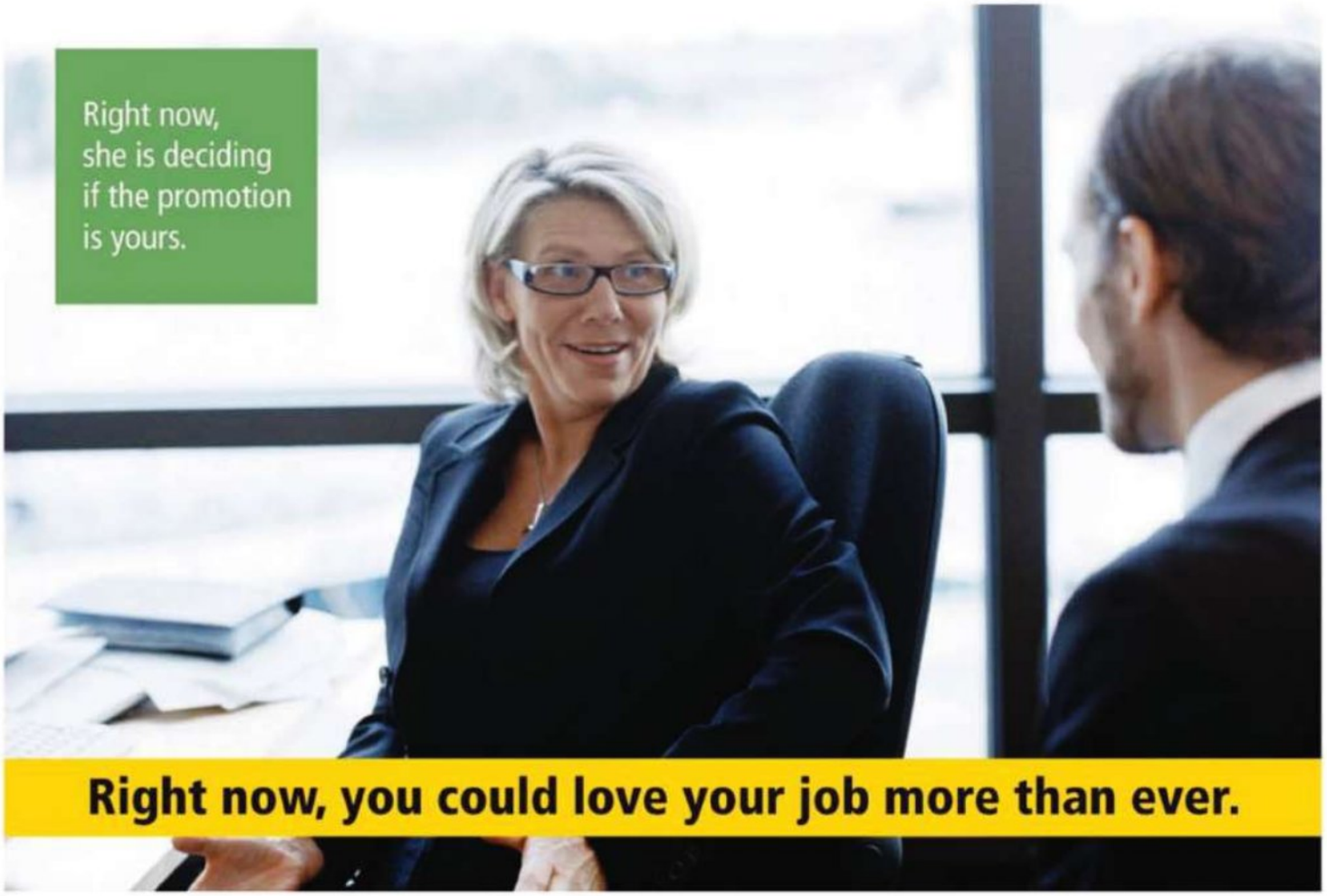

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Financial Aid is available to those who qualify. Argosy University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association (30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60602, 1.800.621.7440, www.ncahlc.org).

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Georgia Southern University is emerging as a leader in providing advanced educational opportunities for business professionals who are pursuing MBAs and other advanced degrees.

Professionals can earn a Georgia Southern University MBA through the online Georgia WebMBA consortium or can attend Georgia Southern classes in Statesboro or Savannah. Georgia Southern's nationally accredited MBA program has a forty-year history and thousands of graduates, which provides an important professional network. The thirty-hour degree program is designed to provide a well-rounded foundation and is taught by faculty members who are leaders in their field. Georgia Southern's competitive tuition means students will also see a faster return on their financial investment.

"Georgia Southern continues to work to make the Master in Business Administration degree more feasible for professionals," says Georgia Southern University MBA Director Melissa Holland. "We understand career-minded people want a top-notch educational experience but cannot take the time away from their professions to earn that degree. We are always looking for new ways to expand our MBA program in a way that will let professionals—regardless of where they live—pursue their advanced education."

The online courses are becoming an increasingly popular option for professionals.

Georgia Southern also offers a Master of Applied Economics degree and a new Master of Science in Computer Science degree online. Students can take online classes twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and interact with students and faculty via the Internet. Many faculty members are also available to answer students' questions over the phone.

"Georgia Southern University is one of the largest and most respected universities in the state, and our excellence has been recognized by *U.S. News and World Report*, The Princeton Review, *Kiplinger's*, and many others," says Georgia Southern University College of Business Administration Dean Ron Shiffler. "An advanced degree from Georgia Southern is backed by more than a century of tradition and is one any executive would be proud to hang on his or her wall."

For more information about online degree opportunities for business professionals at Georgia Southern University, please visit georgiasouthern.edu.

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BACK TO SCHOOL **EARNING YOUR MBA**

Georgia's WebMBA
WEBMBAONLINE.ORG

Georgia's WebMBA

A Popular Choice for Professionals

Darren Greenwald's first visit to Georgia Southern University as a student was the day he received his Masters in Business Administration degree. The Duluth resident took part in the Georgia WebMBA program, which allowed him to do all of his coursework online and without ever having to commute to the Georgia Southern campus.

"It was a flexible, nationally accredited program and that's why I chose it," says Greenwald. "It allowed me to have a full-time job, and it let me really experience technology. I took part in virtual presentations and video conferences, which were very valuable experiences."

Greenwald is not alone. An increasing number of business professionals are going back to school—without going back to campus—through the Georgia WebMBA program.

The Georgia WebMBA is a consortium of six universities around the state that includes Columbus State University, Georgia College and State University, Georgia Southern University, Kennesaw State University, the University of West Georgia, and Valdosta State University. Working together, these business schools have created a top-notch online MBA program that is consistently recognized for its quality and competitive pricing among AACSB programs by *U.S. News & World Report*, *BusinessWeek* online, The Princeton Review, *USA Today*, and geteducated.com.

"Online courses make it possible for business professionals to pursue their next level of higher education with the kind of flexibility necessary for someone with important career responsibilities," says Ron Shiffler, lead dean of the Georgia Web MBA program and dean of Georgia Southern University's College of Business Administration.

Dean and Sewell Chair of Private Enterprise Faye McIntyre of the Richards College of Business at the University of West Georgia adds, "Increasingly, employers are requiring advanced degrees for professionals who want to move into higher positions. But, neither employers nor employees can afford the educational time to come out of the work day. Online learning is the perfect solution."

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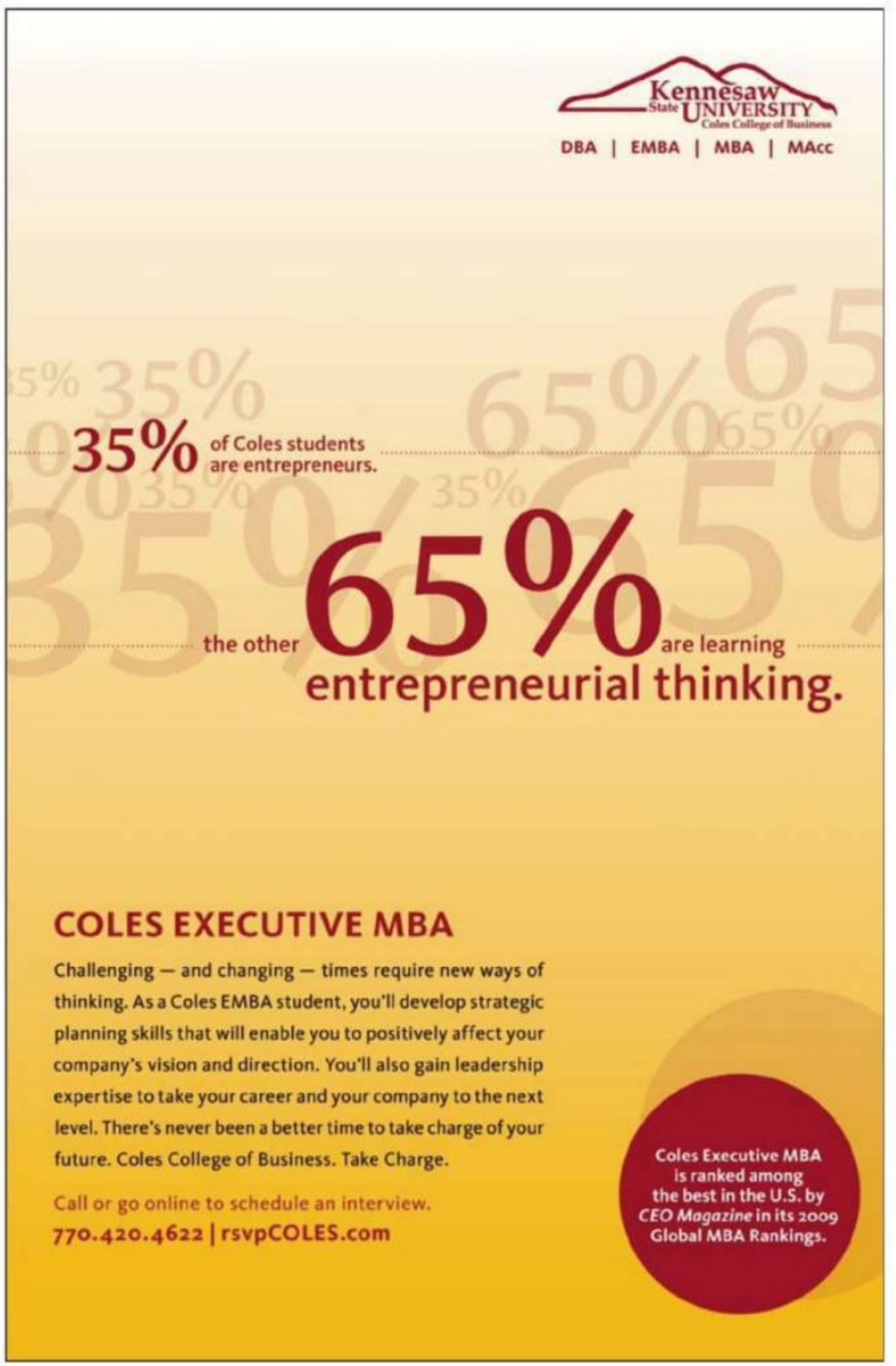

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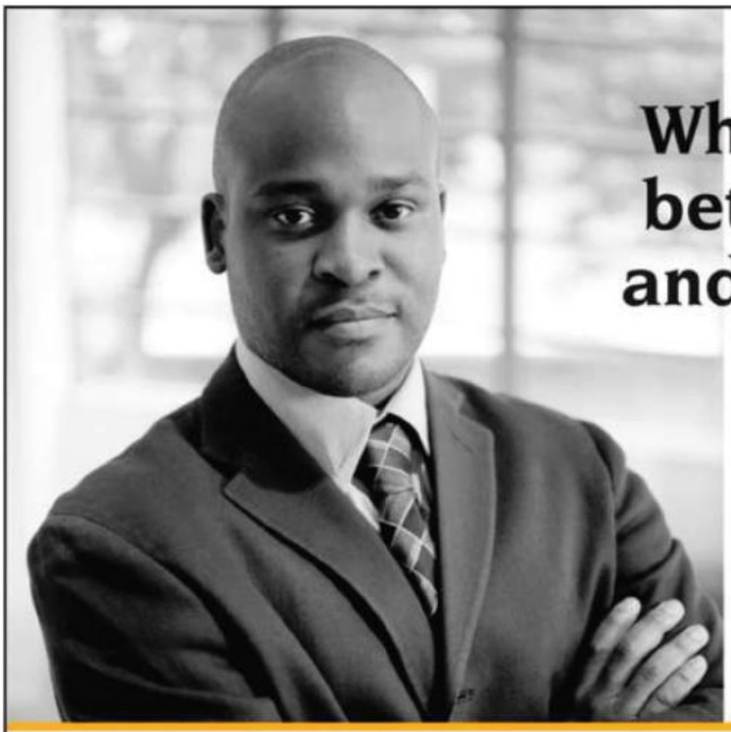

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Troy University was established in Troy, Alabama, in 1887. The university now serves approximately 31,000 students on four campuses located in Alabama and across the globe, including some sixty teaching sites in fifteen U.S. states, twelve countries outside the U.S, and one U.S. territory. Troy University is accredited by the Commissions of Colleges

of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and holds several specialized accreditations.

TROY's Atlanta site is located in Sandy Springs and offers six graduate and three undergraduate degree programs in night and weekend class formats. Several programs are also available entirely online. TROY's MBA program is offered both on campus and online and can be completed in as little as fifteen months.

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Little St. Simon's Island

LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND

DESTINATIONS

Aiken

▶ **aikenis.com**

DAVID LOMINSKA

Aiken, South Carolina, celebrates its 175th anniversary this year and has stories to share. After construction of the railroad and the founding of the town in 1835, Aiken became a destination for Charlestonians looking to escape the summer heat. Decades later, following the Civil War, the city began attracting wealthy Northerners who flocked to Aiken to enjoy the mild winters and equestrian sports. Today, visitors can tour the historic mansions and book rooms in the acclaimed inns and B&Bs. The town also boasts a charming downtown featuring beautiful parkways, wonderful restaurants, and inviting shops.

Brunswick

▶ **comecoastawhile.com**

Rich in history, the coastal city of Brunswick, Georgia, was first surveyed

BGICVB

in 1771 and, like nearby Savannah, the town was laid out in the traditional British street-grid fashion and included lovely parks and squares. Brunswick's Old Town National Historic District features a rich diversity of architectural styles dating back to the nineteenth-century Victorian era. Explore the oak-lined streets and discover unique shops, boutiques, and galleries or take a walking, biking, or driving tour. Brunswick's deep natural harbor has been in continuous use as a thriving seaport, recreational boat landing, and home port for shrimp boats for more than 200 years.

Little St. Simons Island

▶ **littlessi.com**

Little St. Simons Island's 10,000 acres, seven miles of deserted beaches, dense maritime forests, and vast salt marshes welcome no more than thirty-two overnight guests to the sanctuary. The unspoiled island retreat, accessible only by boat, is a favorite destination for romantic getaways, family reunions, honeymoons, individual excursions, and birding and nature adventures. Guest accommodations are situated in six distinctive settings, either beneath the canopy of live oaks in the main lodge compound or along the edge of the nearby river and marsh. Regional cuisine created by the island's skilled chefs from foods grown in the USDA-certified organic garden is another highlight.

LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND

Savannah

▶ **savannahvisit.com**

Savannah is known for its beautiful squares, stately oaks, historic homes, and rollicking River Street. Horse-drawn carriages roll down cobblestone streets, riverboats paddle along the shore, and Paula Deen's famous restaurant The Lady & Sons packs in crowds hungry for great Southern cooking. The city is also

SAVANNAH CVB

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HOTELS & RESORTS

The Chattanoogan

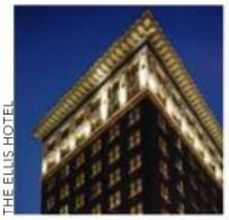
▸ **chattanooganhotel.com**

THE CHATTANOOGAN

Located in the heart of downtown Chattanooga, The Chattanoogan is known as Tennessee's urban resort. Within easy walking distance of museums, shopping, and entertainment, the city itself is one of the key amenities for hotel guests. In addition to its unrivaled location, the resort offers elegant accommodations featuring fabulous views of Chattanooga's Southside and Lookout Mountain, three outstanding restaurants, impressive leisure activities, and a full-service spa.

The Ellis Hotel

▸ **ellishotel.com**


THE ELLIS HOTEL

A refreshing alternative to larger impersonal hotels, the newly renovated Ellis Hotel is a downtown Atlanta landmark with wonderfully cosmopolitan style and a relaxing ambiance. Sophisticated guest rooms and suites feature modern amenities, including 32-inch LCD televisions and iPod docking stations. The chic boutique hotel also boasts an impressive and appropriately cutting-edge restaurant, Terrace, which offers American heirloom dishes created with ingredients from local and regional farmers and fishermen. Among other accolades, the Ellis was recently ranked among the world's best hotels on this year's Expedia Insiders' Select list.

Haywood Park

▸ **haywoodpark.com**

Located in the heart of Asheville's vibrant downtown, within walking distance of the area's finest restaurants, shops, coffee houses, and galleries, the Haywood Park Hotel offers a perfect blend of luxury and convenience. Individually decorated rooms and suites offer a wealth of amenities. Located just

HAYWOOD PARK

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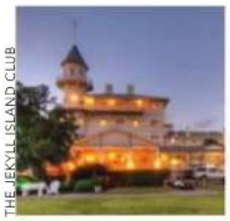
inside the hotel's atrium is a community of shops, restaurants, and businesses working together to make each guest's stay as comfortable and convenient as possible; from high fashion to flowers, visitors will find everything they need close at hand.

Jekyll Island Club Hotel

▶ **jekyllclub.com**



THE JEKYLL ISLAND CLUB

Rated among the top 500 resorts in the world by *Travel + Leisure*, the Jekyll Island Club offers superb resort accommodations, outstanding service, and an unforgettable landmark experience for your next coastal Georgia resort vacation. The Jekyll Island Club Hotel is Jekyll Island's only four-star resort and a National Historic Landmark. Enjoy casual and fine dining, nine miles of beach, bicycling, sixty-three holes of golf, tennis, historic tours, horseback riding, and much more.

The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort

▶ **kingandprince.com**

For seventy-five years, The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort has wowed guests with its legendary charm and idyllic seaside setting on historic St. Simons Island. The coastal Georgia resort offers gracious accommodations, including oceanfront and resort-view guest rooms, seaside cabanas, beach villas, and guest houses. Sensational seaside dining is also a specialty. Guests delight in Southern coastal cuisine while enjoying the ocean views at the resort's acclaimed restaurants. Visitors will also discover recreational activities, historic sites, shopping, and family attractions on the island.

THE KING AND PRINCE

Sea Palms Golf and Tennis Resort

▶ **seapalms.com**

SEA PALMS RESORT

No St. Simons Island resort boasts more amenities than Sea Palms Resort. From the 27-hole golf courses, three clay tennis courts, and three swimming pools to the impressive restaurant and a fully equipped gym, Sea Palms is the perfect place to get away from it all. Lodging options include hotel-style deluxe guest rooms, executive studios, and family-friendly one-, two-, or

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three-bedroom suites. Too, guests at Sea Palms resort are seconds away from beautiful beaches and minutes away from numerous shopping, dining, entertainment, and sightseeing opportunities.

Village Inn & Pub

▶ **villageinnandpub.com**

Nestled under the ancient live oak trees between St. Simons' parks and the historic oceanfront village, visitors will discover a unique inn. Designed around a restored circa-1930 beach cottage, the Village Inn reflects the influence of the surrounding neighborhood. The thirties style also extends into the interiors and ambiance. Each room is unique, adding further to the inn's rich character. The original beach cottage features an antique English pub made of solid mahogany, an original stone fireplace, and other historic treasures.

VILLAGE INN & PUB

DINING

Saltwater Cowboy

▶ **saltcow.com**

SALTWATER COWBOY

The Saltwater Cowboy is St. Simons Island's newest steak and seafood restaurant. Visitors to the historic isle will learn what locals know: The restaurant is a destination for both great food and nightlife. The restaurant is open seven days a week for steak, seafood, or dinner from the raw bar. Evening entertainment features artists ranging from local favorites to big-hit musicians from all over the Southeast.

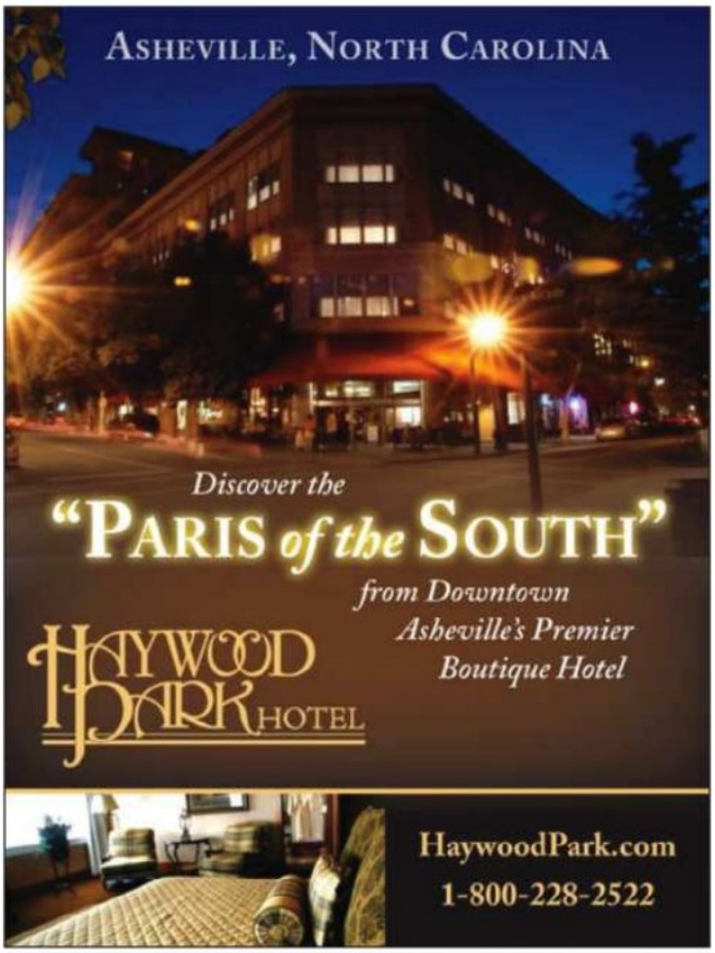
ATTRACTIONS

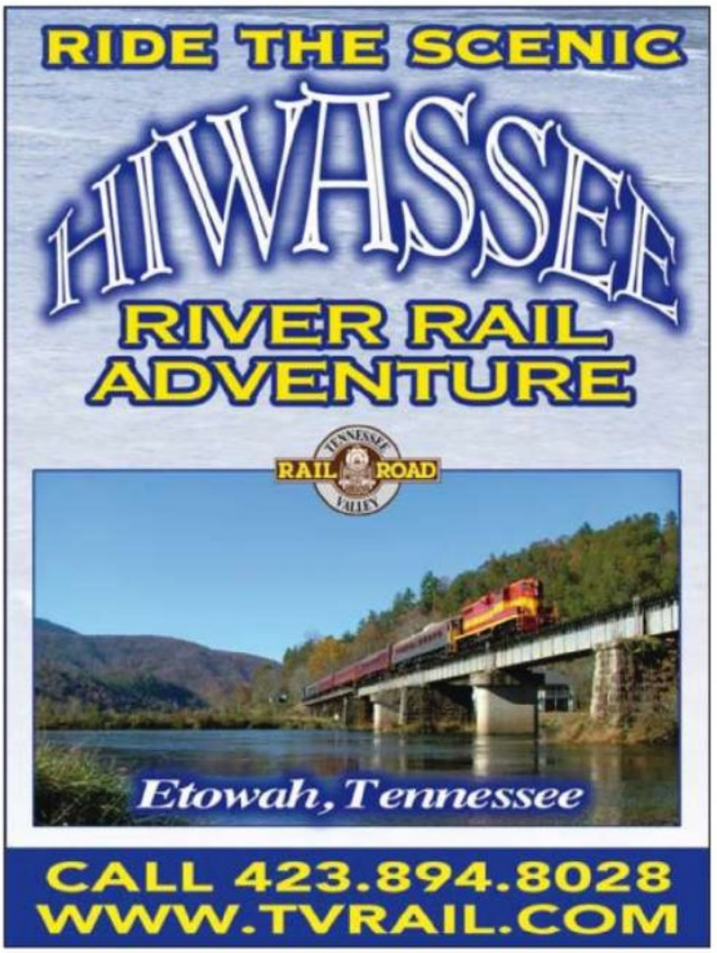
Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum

▶ **tvrail.com**

The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum offers a variety of train rides for railroad enthusiasts of all stripes. For a quick trip, opt for the Missionary Ridge Local. The journey takes fifty-five minutes and includes a ride through a Civil War–era tunnel and a tour of the museum's restoration shop. For a longer ride, try the Chickamauga Turn, a six-hour roundtrip ride to historic Chickamauga, Georgia. Or experience an entire day on the rails on a Dixie Land Excursion. Charter options are also available.

TVRR





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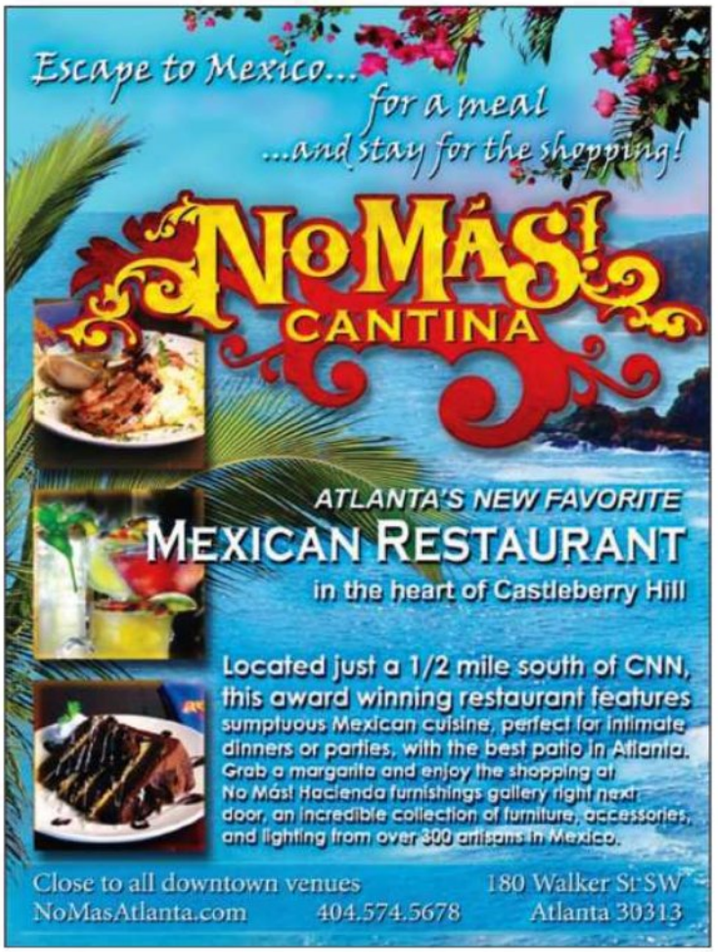

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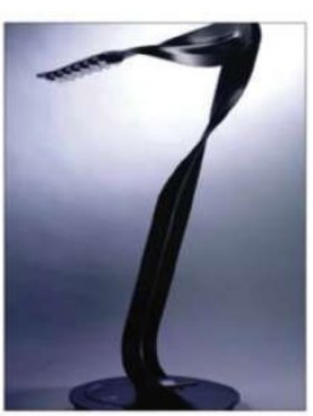

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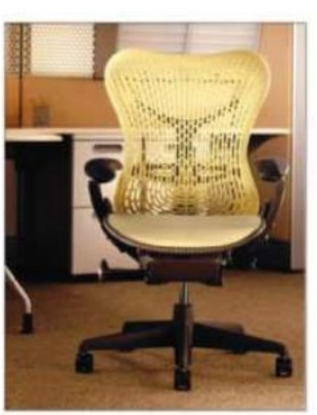

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THE DISCERNING GUIDE

A-list

Farm Burger

FRESH ON THE SCENE

410 WEST PONCE DE LEON AVENUE, DECATUR, 404-378-5077, FARMBURGER.NET. As straightforward as its name, this fast-paced yet thoughtful operation is the Atlanta area's first burger joint to rely exclusively on grass-fed beef, carefully sourced from farms near Athens. If only it were served on a better bun, the house specialty might be described as a crowning achievement—a juicy, unfussy burger whose cohesive texture and honest taste could delight just about anyone. For toppings, the meat is best served by a few biting, fresh leaves of arugula and a fried egg, or a simple combination of house-cured bacon and fine white cheddar. Orders are placed at the counter and delivered to tables in an airy dining room where reclaimed wood and other green materials reflect the kind of intelligence the owners established at Farm Burger's sister operation, the influential Farm 255 in Athens. $ —*Christiane Lauterbach*

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

COAST SEAFOOD & RAW BAR

111 West Paces Ferry Road, 404-869-0777, h2sr.com. Thomas Catherall of Here to Serve Restaurants likes to create restaurants (such as Twist and Noche) that do well with a young, trend-seeking crowd. When he snapped up the former Seeger's, an elegant jewel of a restaurant, folks expected Catherall, a master chef, to behave with a little more dignity. To his credit, he tried, but no matter which way he tweaked it, his attempts at fine dining failed to draw in diners. Diehard Seeger's mourners may cry foul at the sight of a cheap-looking wooden deck built on what was considered hallowed ground, but there is no doubt that it was time to move on. Fun corn and crab hushpuppies, oversized lobster rolls, big bowls of tender mussels, crab legs and shrimp with drawn butter, abundant seafood boils, and inexpensive fish in parchment fly out of the kitchen. Customers bring their kids for casual alfresco dinners. Scantily dressed young things and their preppy beaux gulp weak drinks and easy wines. And while I can't say that I love the brash new decor (complete with some of Catherall's own prized fishing catches mounted here and there), the Barbados/Key West/Buckhead vibes have managed to chase away the ghosts of the past. $$ —*C.L.*

The restaurants that appear in this section are reviewed and recommended by our dining critics and have no connection to advertising.

Key to Symbols

» PRICING
Price classifications are approximate and are based on a typical three-course dinner (appetizer, entree, dessert) for one person, exclusive of alcohol, tax, and tip.

¢	Under $15
$	$16–$30
$$	$31–$49
$$$	$50 and over

» RATINGS
Star ratings are determined by food quality, creativity, service, ambience, and value.

★★★★	Superlative
★★★	Excellent
★★	Very good
★	Good
●	Classic

We welcome your suggestions and comments. Please write us c/o "Dining Out," *Atlanta* magazine, 260 Peachtree Street, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30303; or e-mail us at diningout@atlantamag.emmis.com.

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CRAWFISH SHACK SEAFOOD

4337 Buford Highway, 404-929-6789. Owner Hieu Pham was born in Georgia but buys most of his fresh seafood from Vietnamese shrimpers and fishermen in Louisiana. Since the oil gusher in the Gulf, he's had to pull oysters from his menu. Nonetheless, everything else is going gangbusters at his upbeat Cajun place. The retail counter remains minuscule, with pretty, translucent shrimp and fish fillets on ice. But the dining area, recently doubled in space and outfitted with large picnic tables, is a cheerful haven for New Orleans transplants. Delicious, somewhat unorthodox po'boys made on hoagie rolls (instead of the crisper Louisiana-style French bread) slathered with spicy remoulade; fabulous peel-and-eat or fried shrimp; succulent, angry-red boiled crawfish; combinations of fish and shellfish fried in cornmeal or corn flour batters; brilliant little hushpuppies; and, on weekends, beignets dusted with confectioners' sugar all go down easily. Buy pralines and Cajun pretzels, drink fresh sugarcane juice or Cafe du Monde coffee sweetened with condensed milk, and bring a cooler with you to stock up on fresh seafood. $ —*C.L.*

ELEVEN

1065 Peachtree Street, 404-745-5000, loewshotels.com/atlanta. The new Loews Atlanta Hotel in Midtown seamlessly inserts itself into the local aesthetic: Past the mirrored-glass exterior, the contemporary lobby assails the eyes with its soaring scale, geometric patterns, and gleaming white marble. A swanky stretch of bar perches off the hotel's driveway entrance, as does Eleven, the signature restaurant. The menu attempts to hitch itself to the farm-to-table trend with Southern inflections, but an early meal showed the kitchen struggling. A straightforward pork tenderloin entree with glazed sweet potatoes and collards proved the meal's highlight. Less successful efforts included dry, crumbly cheddar biscuits that sandwiched decent smoked salmon; an odd dip of ham-hock-enriched grits served with chewy dried vegetable chips; and a "Southern bouillabaisse" with fish and Georgia white shrimp that lacked bright, enticing flavors in the broth. Hotel restaurants can always rely to some degree on unwitting travelers, but if Eleven hopes to capture any attention from local diners, it needs to make some serious adjustments quickly. $$ —*Bill Addison*

NOON MIDTOWN

1050 Crescent Avenue, 404-496-4891, noonmidtown.com. Among the sea of chain restaurants along Midtown's Crescent Avenue, Katie Birmingham runs her independent haven with a sunny spirit. She started Noon last year with a breakfast and lunch focus, but this spring she shifted the hours later, serving brunch options (including egg and biscuit dishes) for a few hours starting at 11 a.m., as well as a lunch menu of smart sandwiches (the meatloaf with bacon, cheddar, and tomato jam is a favorite) and salads. The restaurant now also offers dinner, which is where the cooking prowess of this team really starts to shine. Start with a summery cocktail from bartender Reggie

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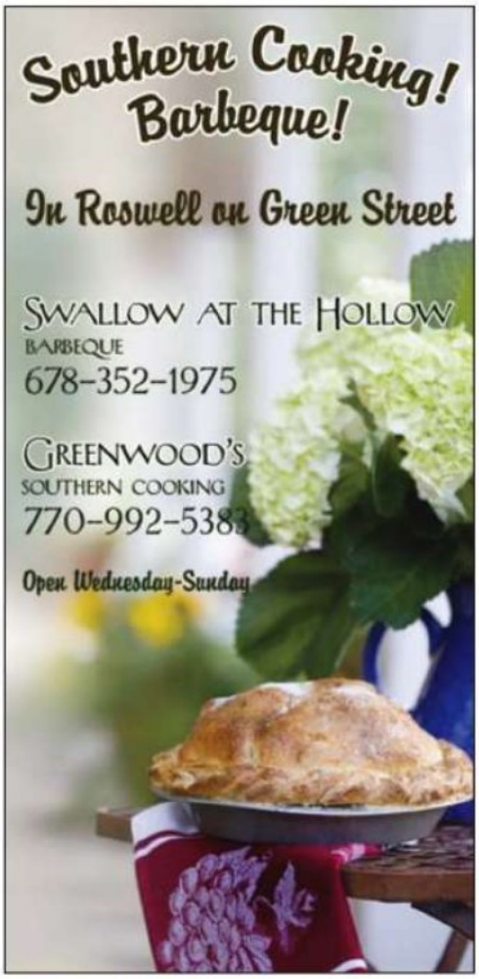

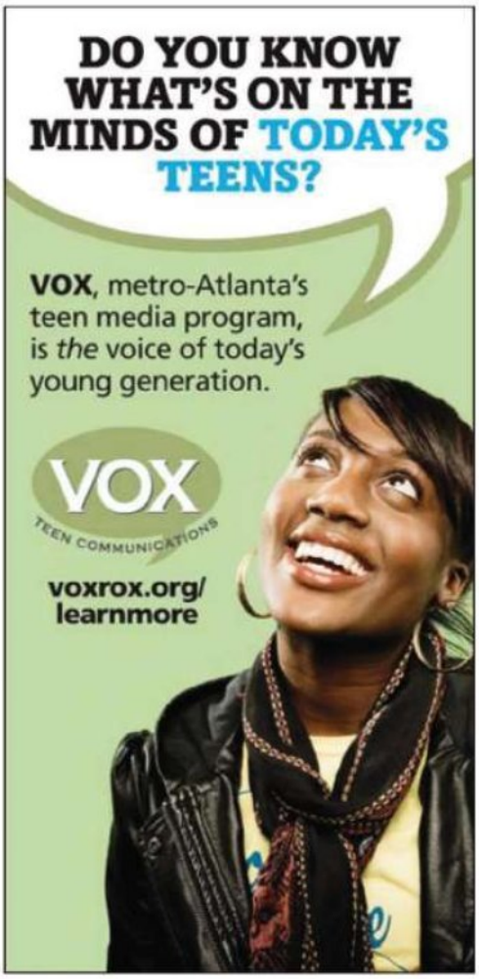

Weekes, such as the orange-tinged Kentucky Rocking Chair made with Four Roses bourbon, while nibbling on warm goat-cheese-stuffed piquillo peppers or gushy potato-manchego croquettes. Entrees revolve often, but a late May meal included silky house-made fettuccine with ricotta, shaved asparagus, and mushrooms, and blushing trout over local lady peas scattered with smoky chunks of pork belly. Main course prices hover around the low to mid-teens, making dinner at Noon an enticing option after a long day at work. $ —*B.A.*

YOUNG AUGUSTINE'S

327 Memorial Drive, 404-681-3344. Young Augustine's has opened in the location of the recently closed Standard, but those of us who rallied around the Standard after a tragic shooting threatened its livelihood still feel vindicated that the neighborhood can support this revamped operation. (Some of the Standard's owners are involved in this equally eclectic incarnation.) The revisions include a much-improved list of draft beer—Augustine of Hippo is the patron saint of brewers—and a bunch of new dishes, ranging from rich pork belly sliders with radish kimchi and fantastic fries crisped in duck fat to totchos (Tater Tot nachos) with "gringo fundido" and brisket hash with poached egg and mustard hollandaise. The menu, cleverly divided into snacks, larger snacks, not snacks at all, and a few entree plates (e.g., pork vindaloo with jasmine rice and a fine fried chicken over stone-ground grits), compares favorably to the food offered at Steinbeck's in Oakhurst, which is part of the same family of local pubs. $ —*C.L.*

THE A-LIST

ABATTOIR ★★★

1170 Howell Mill Road, 404-892-3335, starprovisions.com. Despite the unsettling name (French for "slaughterhouse"), the collage of forty-plus dishes at our 2009 Restaurant of the Year pleases carnivores and vegetarians alike. Anne Quatrano and Clifford Harrison (owners of Bacchanalia and Floataway Cafe), along with chef de cuisine and partner Joshua Hopkins, draw on California and European culinary techniques and apply them to Southern ingredients for a winning merger. The large bar that precedes the dining room is a draw for solo diners or folks who want to slip in just for a snack and a cocktail. The menu changes frequently; worthy staples include house-made charcuterie and maple-bacon beignets for dessert. $$

ALON'S ●

1394 North Highland Avenue, 404-872-6000, alons.com. An entire neighborhood lives by the good bread, terrific sandwiches, fresh pastries, and cakes—not to mention the fantastic selection of cheeses, fresh pasta, and ambitious prepared food—of this crucial Morningside bakery and cafe. The cookies by the pound are an exceptional value, and special treats mark nearly every holiday on the calendar. A newer, larger location of Alon's is across from Perimeter Mall (4505 Ashford Dunwoody Road, 678-397-1781). $

ANTICO PIZZA NAPOLETANA

1093 Hemphill Avenue, 404-724-2333, anticopizza.it. When owner Giovanni Di Palma and his pizzaioli, Enrico Liberato and Luca Varuni, started making fabulous Neapolitan-style pies in the back of this former bakery near Georgia Tech, they had little to offer their customers in terms of creature comforts. Everybody ate standing up around a huge wooden table, reaching for oily sweet peppers and fresh garlic to season the already-glorious margheritas and biancas with swollen edges and a good char. Now that there are chairs, stools, and even a chef's table (available by reservation), early fans can recommend the place to their cushier friends. $

ARIA ★★

490 East Paces Ferry Road, 404-233-7673, aria-atl.com. Chef-owner Gerry Klaskala's chic and understated Buckhead restaurant, known for sourcing local ingredients such as Riverview Farms pork, continues to draw a steady stream of loyal diners since its opening in 2000. Standbys such as the wolffish over truffled corn risotto and the warm lobster cocktail remain on the menu alongside new seasonal dishes. Kathryn King creates some of the dreamiest desserts in town. $$

AU RENDEZ-VOUS ★★

1328 Windsor Parkway, 404-303-1968. This tiny French bistro at the edge of Brookhaven is still as modest and authentic as the day it opened seven years ago. The owners, a French Vietnamese chef and his wife, have seduced the community with everyday French fare such as garlicky escargots, stuffed mussels, poulet cocotte, and homemade chocolate fondant. Fresh soups and salads come with the entrees, and although a meal is no longer an astonishing bargain, there is no doubt Jean-Claude and Juliette Changivy run the best Gallic restaurant for the money. (Cash or check only) $

BABETTE'S CAFE

573 North Highland Avenue, 404-523-9121, babettescafe.com. Chef-owner Marla Adams has won devotees over the years with her gentle cooking style, a rustic blend of European and American sensibilities. Mussels with white wine and strawberries and lamb stew with "young" vegetables are lovely springtime dishes. $$

BACCHANALIA ★★★★

1198 Howell Mill Road, 404-365-0410, starprovisions.com. Many four-star restaurants employ pomp and theater to dazzle their guests, but Anne Quatrano and Clifford Harrison nail the equally demanding art of subtlety at their fine-dining standard-bearer. The staff—informed, friendly but not chummy, and exactingly professional—guides you through the restaurant's four-course prix fixe menu full of seasonal, quietly thrilling choices. Overall, the food is as sharp as ever, and the wine list is showing bolder character these days. Tip for solo diners and couples: Eschew reservation wrangling by sitting at the small bar and ordering from the menu a la carte. $$$

BHOJANIC ★★

1363 Clairmont Road, Decatur, 404-633-9233, bhojanic.com. It might seem contradictory that a restaurant with the tagline "Fusion—Home-

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style Indian—Tapas" would serve the most attuned North Indian dishes in the area. But Archna Becker—who owns the restaurant with her family—holds a marketing degree from Georgia State University and is inclined to pepper her business slogans with distinguishing language. Standout dishes include the lamb curry, Punjabi kadhi (fluffy onion dumplings in a yogurt sauce), and the cornmeal flatbread called makki ki roti. $$

BISTRO VG ★★★

70 West Crossville Road, Roswell, 770-993-1156, knowwheretogogh.com. It is a tribute to veteran restaurateurs Chris and Michele Sedgwick that Bistro VG's all-white interior feels swank and calming rather than antiseptic and dated. The couple pulled off an extreme makeover of their signature restaurant, Van Gogh's, in 2006, and the restaurant is still one of the fine-dining bright spots in the northern suburbs. Executive chef Richard Velazquez's menu balances an unusually smart mix of New American favorites (meaty crab cakes with mustard beurre blanc, filet mignon with black truffle butter) and imaginative dishes that play with urbane trends. His "oxtail ragout en croute" is essentially a potpie filled with soulfully tender meat, and his piquant, exquisite steak tartare will make you wonder why this Continental classic ever fell out of favor. Desserts (tiramisu, beignets, chocolate fritters) could use a creative jolt. The finale of a meal, for now, is finishing the last sips of wine chosen from a wisely edited list of New World and French selections. $$$

BOCADO ★★

887 Howell Mill Road, 404-815-1399, bocado-atlanta.com. Bocado may be the Westside's first true neighborhood restaurant, bearing all the strengths and imperfections that label implies. It straddles the edge between affordable and occasion dining, and the menu is low-key with a vengeance: sandwiches at lunch and a lengthy list of seasonal small plates with only a few entrees at dinner. Executive chef Todd Ginsberg's experience in fine dining helps him infuse comforting dishes (oyster stew, a compact but satisfying double cheeseburger, veal cheek with polenta) with playful finesse. $

BUSY BEE CAFE ●

810 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, 404-525-9212, thebusybeecafe.com. Many of the old soul-food restaurants have become caricatures, but this is the real deal. This always-crowded place, a favorite with politicos and police officers since 1947, serves delicious fried chicken, smothered pork chops, oxtails, and more with traditional vegetables (e.g., greens cooked with turkey) and superb corn muffins. Sweet potato pie, peach cobbler, and a moist, three-layered Key lime cake let you know where you are: Atlanta! ¢

CAFE 101 ★★

5412 Buford Highway, Doraville, 770-458-8883. The distinctive round building with scalloped edges that houses this groovy Taiwanese-style Szechuan restaurant looks like a giant top ready to spin. A steady stream of mostly Asian customers pours in and out, and foodies from all over embrace this refreshing mix of high-

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energy modern design and ethnic authenticity. The menu includes a long list of killer specialties such as bitter melon and spareribs soup, "drunken" chicken marinated in wine, dan dan noodles with hot oil and garlic, ma po tofu with ground pork, and spicy hot boiled fish fillet. Exotic fruit smoothies, bubble teas, and shaved ice desserts are a must, and the social scene alone is worth a visit. $

CAKES & ALE ★★★

254 West Ponce de Leon Avenue, Decatur, 404-377-7994, cakesandalerestaurant.com. The Cakes & Ale crew takes the "farm-to-table" credo seriously. Chef-owner Billy Allin's straightforward menus truly ebb and flow with the growing seasons. A spring meal, for example, tasted of the moment: minted pea soup; the nutty grain farro piled in a bowl, surrounded by tender young vegetables; fresh halibut fillet with clams in a saffron-kissed broth. Pastry chef Cynthia Wong's rhubarb crumble applied the final strokes to the springtime portrait. Menu staples are few, but look for creamy arancini (tiny globes of fried risotto) and the gingery cookies, sandwiched with mascarpone cream, called "phatty cakes." $$

CANOE ★★★

4199 Paces Ferry Road, 770-432-2663, canoeatl.com. After floods destroyed the restaurant's interior last fall, Canoe has recovered swimmingly. A new al fresco bar sits on the edge of the Chattahoochee River, with a placid view of the baby-blue bridge that spans Paces Ferry Road. A first-time customer could walk into the dining room and never sense what happened. The space has been gently updated with fresh carpet patterns and fabrics that line booths, but it retains the same clubby rusticity embraced by regulars. Carvel Grant Gould, who has been executive chef since 2006, understands her audience. Dishes such as a sculptural beet and goat cheese salad, fish specials with Asian overtones, and slow-roasted short rib embellished with chocolate vinegar maintain the New American philosophy while also subtly pushing the cooking in up-to-date directions. Thomas Numprasong, one of the city's unsung pastry talents, incorporates the kind of wit into his creations (try the "Whiskied Chattahoochee Mud," a gossamer mousse pie) that makes them a genuine finale. $$$

THE COLONNADE ●

1879 Cheshire Bridge Road, 404-874-5642. The evolution of Atlanta from small burg to gay-friendly boom town is here for all to experience. Located behind an Eisenhower-era motel, this large and still very popular establishment has a fiercely loyal clientele. Everyone has a favorite dish. For some it's the fried chicken; for others, the oyster stew, salmon croquettes with egg sauce, or tomato aspic. Crusty servers take the orders, the decor is pure time-warp comfort, and the yeast rolls can't be beat. (No credit cards; closed during lunch on weekdays) $

DOGWOOD ★★

565 Peachtree Street, 404-835-1410, dogwood-restaurant.com. Dogwood sits on a busy stretch of Peachtree Street—though, admittedly, in the commercial purgatory between Downtown and Midtown—and it deserves more traffic. Office workers and doctors from Emory University Hospital Midtown often fill the sleek bar for an after-hours drink. The dining room beyond is much more staid, but the beige gentility sets the proper tone for Shane Touhy's confident New Southern cooking. He uses fashionable ingredients (grits, pickled watermelon, Benton's bacon and country ham) in restrained ways that respect the straightforward essence of Southern cooking. Did we mention the valet is free? $$

DYNAMIC DISH ★★★

427 Edgewood Avenue, 404-688-4344, dynamic-dish.net. Throw out your preconceived notions about vegetarian restaurants when you enter this modish little cafe in the Old Fourth Ward. Chef-owner David Sweeney creates a short, daily changing menu of five or so items—soups, sandwiches, salads, and a composed vegetable plate. But this isn't turgid, doctrine-fueled cooking: It's a poetic expression of organic, mostly local produce. $

ECCO ★★★

40 Seventh Street, 404-347-9555, ecco-atlanta.com. Ecco, with its congenial spirit and multifaceted Italian menu, consistently earns its place as the

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brightest star in the Fifth Group Restaurants constellation. Midtown locals can wander in, settle at the bar, order a plate of homemade pappardelle with chile-braised pork, select a glass of wine from the broad list, and chat with some of the most personable bartenders in town. The dining room and menu also have enough polish to carry an evening with a sense of occasion. Share the fried goat cheese glazed with honey and black pepper and then split a pizza. Choose entrees that teeter between homey and refined, such as the pork chop schnitzel with fennel, orange, and pecorino. There always seems to be the question of where to dine well on Sunday evenings in Atlanta; Ecco is one standout answer. $$

FLIP BURGER BOUTIQUE ★

1587 Howell Mill Road, 404-352-3547, flipburgerboutique.com. Richard Blais, of *Top Chef: Chicago* and foie gras milkshake fame, and his partners fuel the city's burger mania at their Westside showboat. Lines often trail out the door while folks wait to be seated in the clean-lined white space that marries the aesthetics of Ikea and French designer Philippe Starck. The twenty or so burger choices let you stay as conventional or go as wacky as you please (we love the "Southern," a country-fried beef patty topped with pimento cheese). You'll also find variations made with pâté, shrimp, chorizo, and falafel. $

FLOATAWAY CAFE ★★★

1123 Zonolite Road, 404-892-1414, starprovisions.com. Often called the Chez Panisse of Atlanta, Clifford Harrison and Anne Quatrano's venture is everything an informal chef-run restaurant should be. The menu is fluid and seasonal, and the flavors make one think of the best of California and the Italian countryside (try the hand-cut pasta with veal ricotta meatballs) with a solid underpinning of farm-to-table local products. The artsy location still feels fresh, and an expansion has doubled the number of lucky souls who gain access to a world where creativity never means pretension. $$

GREENWOOD'S ON GREEN STREET ★★

1087 Green Street, Roswell, 770-992-5383. Bill Greenwood looks like Santa and cooks like a lovable mom. His eccentric take on American home cooking rests on serious culinary roots, and the restaurant has charm to burn. Fried chicken, duck specials, habit-forming broccoli casserole, and juicy pies with old-fashioned crusts all hide their sophistication under a satisfying layer of tradition. $

GRINDHOUSE KILLER BURGERS

209 Edgewood Avenue, 404-522-3444, grindhouseburgers.com. This new lunch-only counter inside Sweet Auburn Curb Market—run by young, hip Alex Brounstein—is the best thing that could have happened to a facility where good food has been in short supply. The concept is old-fashioned with a twist: A freshly ground, hand-patted blend of Angus chuck and brisket is available as a quarter-pound patty (single or double), or in a baby version for the slider combo. Cooked to order and sandwiched into buttered, toasted potato buns, burgers can be topped with ingredients such as fresh-roasted

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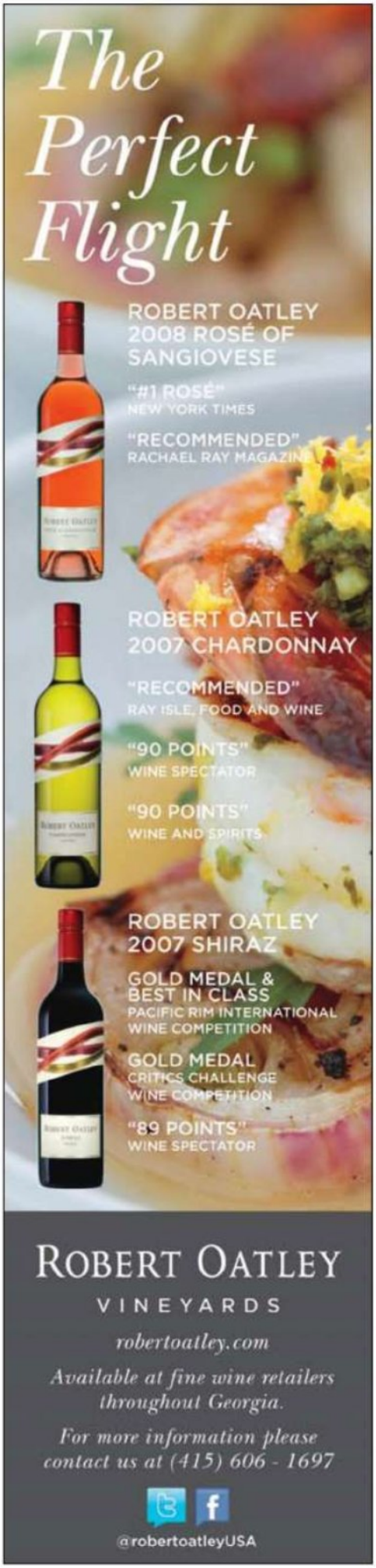

green chiles, thick rashers of bacon, and real American cheddar. Crinkle fries, fresh onion rings, and thick, hand-spun shakes complete the feast. $

HIGHLAND BAKERY ●

655 Highland Avenue, 404-586-0772, highland-bakery.com. It's hard to beat breakfast or lunch at this popular neighborhood cafe, converted from a historic redbrick bakeshop, that draws artists, rockers, and power-lunchers alike. The homemade cinnamon rolls, assorted muffins, and whimsical specialty cakes keep customers coming back, and Sunday brunchers can't seem to get enough of the sweet potato pancakes, shrimp and grits, and crab cakes Benedict. $

HOLEMAN AND FINCH PUBLIC HOUSE ★★★

2277 Peachtree Road, Suite B, 404-948-1175, holeman-finch.com. You could think of Holeman as a hip gastropub with a Southern lilt, but the restaurant really defies labeling. Owner Linton Hopkins; his partners, mixologists Greg Best and Andy Minchow; and their team made the commitment to cook foods and devise cocktails that appeal to their own tastes. In doing so, their dishes range from comforting (spot-on pimento cheese, a killer take on pasta carbonara) to provocative (curried beef tongue terrine, anyone?). The cheeseburger, available in limited quantities only after 10 p.m. and at Sunday brunch, has a cult life of its own. Come early or late: It gets sensationally crowded and reservations aren't accepted. $$

HONEY PIG ★★

3473 Old Norcross Road, Suite 305, Duluth, 770-476-9292. Here, pork belly rather than beef and domed grills (dolpans) rather than embers redefine the notion of Korean barbecue. With its modern decor and breezy service, this outpost of a small California chain is perfect for a fun date. Main courses come with free snacks (radish slices marinated with wasabi, kimchi soup), condiments, and lettuce and rice wrappers. The waiters do most of the cooking, including a final course of sizzling rice and bits and morsels left on the grill. $

JAVA JIVE ●

790 Ponce de Leon Avenue, 404-876-6161. For ten years, Steven Horwitz and his wife, Shira Levetan, have kept the neighborhood awake with strong coffee, fluffy biscuits, stacked pancakes, and fried matzo in the cafe where they display their collection of old toasters and vintage stoves. We'll brave long waits for the weekend-only gingerbread waffles with lemon curd. Insider tip: Levetan also bakes wedding cakes. (Cash only) ¢

KROG BAR ★★

112 Krog Street, 404-524-1618, krogbar.com. Kevin Rathbun's wine-and-tapas bar promotes communal interaction rather than date-night tête-à-tête. The space is minuscule, and strangers start conversations over finger food such as duck prosciutto tramezzini (crustless triangular Italian sandwiches), cured meats, fab cheeses, and chocolate bruschetta sprinkled with sea salt. Linger under the stars in the romantic outdoor nook. $

KYMA ★★★

3085 Piedmont Road, 404-262-0702, buckhead-restaurants.com. Karatassos the father provided the venue, Atlanta's first fine-dining Greek estiatorio, and Karatassos the son ran with the concept, showing once and for all that talent runs in the family. Some of the best and freshest seafood in the city passes through this kitchen, and the family recipes (we love the wood-grilled octopus) have been given a marvelous upscale twist. Greek wines, ouzo, and good service make for a fine time, and the over-the-top decor adds a touch of magic to this Buckhead Life Restaurant Group fantasy. $$

LA PIETRA CUCINA ★★★

1545 Peachtree Street, 404-888-8709, lapietracucina.com. A meal doesn't feel complete at La Pietra without crisscrossing through the full gamut of executive chef Bruce Logue's progressive Italian cooking. Begin with the prosciutto di Parma served with crunchy flatbread, fresh ricotta, and zippy pineapple mostarda. One of Logue's crudos—a variation on seafood tartare such as tuna with avocado and marjoram in cucumber brodo—cleanses the palate before a warm antipasto, perhaps duck and chestnut tortellini with cured foie gras or the Mario Batali–inspired Sicilian calamari. Then, the extraordinary pastas: pappardelle with bolognese, tagliatelle tossed with the most seasonal vegetables, the signature black spaghetti with rock shrimp and sausage, unpredictable specials. Recent visits reveal that the restaurant has truly settled into its revamped space, and the kitchen and service staff have found consistent, synchronous rhythms. $$

LAZEEZ TAVA FRY ★

4650 Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Suite 133-A, Norcross, 770-939-1221, lazeeztavafry.com. Interwoven among Lazeez's typical Indian-restaurant dishes (samosas, tandoori chicken, vegetable biryani) are Muslim specialties from India's western state of Gujarat. Granted, stir-fried goat brains with black pepper and tomato may only appeal to the most adventurous appetites, but plenty of other gently spiced, meat-centric novelties hold comforting appeal. Go on the weekend for green gosht, a mesmerizing goat curry pungent with herbs, coconut, and cashews. $

LEON'S FULL SERVICE ★

131 East Ponce de Leon Avenue, Decatur, 404-687-0500, leonsfullservice.com. This instantly popular speakeasy, opened by the owners of the Brick Store Pub, nails the tastes of the Decatur throngs. Cocktails are fashioned with intelligence and wit; order anything that includes freshly juiced fruits or vegetables. Absorb the alcohol with a poetically simple burger made from White Oak Pastures beef and fantastic frites served with dipping sauces such as aioli, peppercorn gravy, and curry ketchup. $$

Tune In

>> Listen to restaurant columnist Christiane Lauterbach dish on Atlanta's dining scene on WMLB AM1690, "The Voice of the Arts." Visit atlanta-magazine.com for details.

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LUNACY BLACK MARKET

231 Mitchell Street, 404-736-6164, lunacyblackmarket.com. Eccentricity is Paul Luna's middle name. At times better known for his colorful dining room persona than for his exceptional culinary mojo, the enfant terrible with the gray ponytail has just given Atlanta an unexpected gift. After many years away in California, he opened a makeshift neighborhood dining room Downtown, where he now serves incredible food at ridiculously low prices. Expect to pay around two or three dollars for small plates such as purple cabbage salad with Gorgonzola and toasted walnuts, a duo of crisp mozzarella and herb risotto cakes, fragrant roasted mushrooms with crushed tomato sauce, or a cute chicken leg in curry redolent of cinnamon and cardamom. Parking may present some challenges, but you'll enjoy supporting a pioneering effort. $

MANUEL'S TAVERN ●

602 North Highland Avenue, 404-525-3447, manuelstavern.com. Nothing says "Atlanta" better than this venerable institution, founded in 1956 by staunch Democrat Manuel Maloof and now run by his family. Politicians, writers, law enforcement officers, celebrities, and regular joes mingle in a warren of rooms and commune over chicken wings, hot dogs, burgers, and perfectly decent grub. Lunch and a weekend breakfast make it possible for the city to live at Manuel's nearly round the clock. ¢

MILLER UNION ★★★

999 Brady Avenue, 678-733-8550, millerunion.com. Neal McCarthy and Steven Satterfield, both Atlanta restaurant veterans, thrust their combined talents into the limelight at this Westside destination with a charming Southern lilt. McCarthy directs a front-of-the-house staff that radiates warmth, and he curates a fantastic wine list heavy on intriguing, affordable European options. Satterfield, the executive chef, creates understated dishes tied closely to local, seasonal ingredients. Early favorites include the farm egg baked in celery cream with toast and slow-braised rabbit with wild mushrooms over silky grits. In a slow period for ambitious restaurant openings, Miller Union stands out as the most exciting newcomer in Atlanta. $$

MUSS & TURNER'S ★★

1675 Cumberland Parkway, Suite 309, Smyrna, 770-434-1114, mussandturners.com. What began as an imaginative deli has blossomed into a full-service restaurant. Small plates on the monthly changing dinner menu can range from pimento cheese to beef tartare, and entrees lean toward comfort. The kitchen gets especially creative at brunch, and the sandwiches that established the restaurant's reputation are still among the best in the metro area. $

PERSEPOLIS ★★

6435 Roswell Road, 404-257-9090, persepoliscuisine.com. This superior Persian restaurant looks like a formal living room, with ornate columns and posh decorative touches. Exotic spreads, buttered rice pilafs, aromatic stews, and juicy kebabs come both a la carte and buffet-style, and the grocery store in the front sells all you need to reproduce the dishes at home. $

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THE PORTER BEER BAR ★★

1156 Euclid Avenue, 404-223-0393, theporterbeerbar.com. At first glance, the Porter appears to be merely a handsomely scruffy bar favored by the Little Five Points crew. But take a gander at the menu. The drink list is a world tour of booze—not simply pages of beers in most every style imaginable, but a dashing assemblage of cocktails and some serious bourbon options. While permanent food offerings consist mainly of affable pub grub, Nick Rutherford (who owns the bar with wife and fellow Seeger's alum Molly Gunn) raises the bar when it comes to the specials list and the brunch menu. $

PURA VIDA ★★★

656 North Highland Avenue, 404-870-9797, puravidatapas.com. Tapas may be the trend that never ended in Atlanta, but chef-owner Hector Santiago keeps the concept frisky with his ever-changing menu of whimsical, familiar yet exotic small plates. Dishes may be as simple as blanched, pencil-thin white asparagus drizzled with chili oil or as intricate as a reworked Cuban sandwich with in-house roasted and smoked meats and homemade pickles. Weekdays offer couples a mellow spot for date night, though the crowds get more rambunctious on the weekend. It's probably those precisely muddled mojitos. $$

RESTAURANT EUGENE ★★★

2277 Peachtree Road, 404-355-0321, restauranteugene.com. Linton Hopkins has grown from a competent fine-dining chef to one of the driving minds behind Atlanta's reclamation of Southern gastronomy. A shift to his menu structure at Restaurant Eugene emphasizes his commitment: He now offers a nightly changing selection of more than forty dishes, dominated by small plates and divided into three sections that focus on vegetables, seafood, and meat and game. It's a local, seasonal thrill ride. Come with folks who like to share. $$

SHAUN'S ★★★

1029 Edgewood Avenue, 404-577-4358, shaunsrestaurant.com. Shaun Doty's chic little Inman Park bistro is especially strong at the moment, with a kind of hard-won playfulness that puts it ahead of much of the competition. Doty now cooks from the heart and better connects to the Southern milieu with dishes such as a Carolina Gold rice soup with duck confit, peanuts, and scallions, and a new black-eyed pea soup featuring a small atoll of cheese and Tabasco floating on the surface. Zesty bar bites, special deals ($29 prix fixe available 5 to 7 p.m. in the dining room or all night at the bar; the unbeatable $12 pasta night on Sunday), and an affordable brunch make it possible for gourmets on a budget to get in the door. Doty's cheeseburger made with organic beef entitles you to the best pommes frites in town, cooked in duck fat. $$

SHOYA ★★

6035 Peachtree Road, Suite A-101, Doraville, 770-457-5555, shoyaatlanta.com. "Izakaya" is the new buzzword among fans of Japanese cuisine. It describes a tavern at which patrons are meant to linger over drinks and interesting small plates. Start with a citrusy shochu cocktail and nibble through the head-spinning array of small dishes such as aji namerou (mackerel with ginger and miso), hamachi kama (yellowtail collar), grilled chicken livers, and ochazuke (a meal-ending bowl of rice with barley tea, often topped with salmon). $

SOUPER JENNY ★

56 East Andrews Drive, 404-239-9023, souperjennyatl.com. When actress-caterer-entrepreneur Jenny Levison opened her cozy Buckhead cafe ten years ago, it had six seats. Since then, she's expanded the space twice to accommodate her loyal customers, who pack the place for her stellar soups (expect refreshing chilled soups in the summer) and Tuesday and Thursday night grilled cheese specials. The menu changes daily. ¢

TAQUERIA DEL SOL ★

Multiple locations, including 2165 Cheshire Bridge Road, 404-321-1118, taqueriadelsol.com. There is nothing not to love about this gourmet-on-a-budget offspring of the old Sundown Cafe. The cross-cultural tacos, wonderfully gloppy enchiladas, spicy turnip greens, and blue plate specials created by Eddie Hernandez are the stuff of legend. The lines form early, but the cheerful minimalist decor doesn't encourage lingering and the tables turn over at top speed. ¢

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TAQUERIA LA OAXAQUEÑA ★★

6738 Tara Boulevard, Jonesboro, 770-960-3010. Some of the best (and largest) tacos in town emerge from the primitive kitchen of this modest little spot that is always packed with Hispanic work crews. Here, handmade corn tortillas are folded around delicacies such as stewed beef cheeks and pork al pastor. The house specialty, the tlayuda (a cross between a pizza and a tortilla, showered with meats, shredded lettuce, and two kinds of Mexican cheeses), is arguably better than the tacos and the flavorful house chicken mole. (Cash only) ¢

TASTY CHINA ★★

585 Franklin Road, Marietta, 770-419-9849, tastychina.com. The mystique of Peter Chang's brief but indelible reign as Tasty China's opening chef in 2006 will apparently never fade. Every textural and spicy nuance of the restaurant's Szechuan specialties—"hot and numbing" beef dishes, wonton soup in hot chili oil, cilantro fish rolls—is compared to how it tasted when Chang helmed the kitchen. Yet Tasty China remains one of the finest regional Chinese restaurants around. When the Szechuan peppercorns burn too fiercely, douse the flames with fish and sour cabbage soup. $

TOMO ★★★

3256 Cobb Parkway, 770-690-0555, tomorestaurant.com. Tomohiro Naito and his superlative pastry chef wife, Kimiko, have been operating for the last five years out of a modest location in a shopping center just over the Cobb County line. Atlantans who complain about the demise of fine dining ought to see Tomo's fluke sashimi arranged like a cathedral's rose window, with tiny notes of green micro-cilantro and red sriracha sauce, as well as his seared monkfish liver terrine with ponzu jelly. While this simple dining room also excels at traditional preparations, its most devoted clientele enjoy beguiling and imaginative modern Japanese dishes such as uni and shiso leaf tempura, tuna tartare with Japanese yam and pink peppercorns, black sesame flan with pulled sugar, and mango "sunny-side up" with coconut panna cotta and trompe l'oeil "bacon" made of thin strips of batter. $$$

WOODFIRE GRILL ★★★

1782 Cheshire Bridge Road, 404-347-9055, woodfiregrill.com. Thanks to chef and co-owner Kevin Gillespie's star turn on *Top Chef*, Woodfire Grill has suddenly become the toughest reservation in town. The boon for Atlantans is that much of Gillespie's food is way more thrilling to eat than to watch on TV. You can taste his affection for the South in plates such as boneless circles of wood-grilled local quail arranged over sweet potato puree glossed with brown butter. Expect similar dishes wrought with equal parts intelligence and soulfulness, but don't hope for that exact entree: Gillespie constantly rotates his menu to reflect the ingredients he procures from nearby farms. $$$ ■

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✱ Hollis Gillespie

The Giving Tree

A little weed goes a long way

SOME SAY A WEED CAN'T grow into a tree, but there is a weed growing out from under my neighbor Robert's house with a trunk the size of my thigh. He should have cut the weed when it was small, but when it comes to his lawn, Robert doesn't cut much. His yard is so untamed it actually swallows things.

But my girl, for one, likes growth and vegetation. Last year when she was eight, she took a seed from the apple she was eating and planted it in our front yard. Soon after, a green weed grew up in almost the same spot, and she took to believing that was her very tree sprouting. I didn't tell her it was a weed and let her believe what she believed. I figured she'd lose interest soon enough. I should have known better, because that's all kids are is interest.

I live on an active intown Atlanta street, with a cement plant five doors down. My front yard is small, consisting of barely two patches divided by a path from the front door to the sidewalk. It's hard to maneuver a lawn mower in such a confined spot, so, in short, Mae's weed got mowed. Mae came home from school that day and immediately burst into tears. I didn't know why she was upset. "My tree! My tree!" she cried, and it suddenly dawned on me that I had accidentally chopped down Mae's tree.

"The top just got cut off," I clamored. "The bottom is still there; it will sprout back up soon enough." A few days later I found another weed and plunked it into the ground where the other had stood. When Mae discovered the new sprout, she surrounded it with stakes and yellow hazard tape, with a sign that read, "Please don't chop the apple tree."

Over the ensuing days, she watered that weed and tended to it like an incubated baby, and I began to feel bad because it was just a weed—and not even a rooted weed at that, but a weed just plunked in for appearances. So as the weeks went on and she didn't lose interest, I began a process that involved the plunking of larger weeds in place of previous weeds so as to emulate the actual growth of an actual tree. I wouldn't say it was an exhausting process, but it was a very involved one. Each progression involved trespassing in my neighbor's yard, because his weeds are much heartier than mine. In fact, that weed growing up the side of his house reaches five feet above the roof.

Anyway, each time I swapped out one weed for another, I had to inspect it to make sure it was of the same variety as the former, because by now Mae had turned nine and I worried she was becoming less susceptible to subterfuge. On the contrary, though, she was so encouraged with the growth of her apple seed she decided to plant a garden, with peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, and stalks—actual stalks—of corn. I had no idea if the hardened soil in my measly front yard could support a vegetable garden, but my daughter had no doubt. We created a garden bed by standing old bookshelves on their sides and staking them into place with eighteen spare eggbeaters from Value Village. Today we have stalks—actual stalks—of corn in there. They are as high as an elephant's eye (or that of a baby elephant, anyway). The tomato vines are even taller.

Then one day my neighbor Robert stopped by to comment on our garden, and I filled him in on Mae's "apple tree" and how I had been grabbing weeds from his yard to stand in for the stages of a budding sapling. "Maybe one of them will take root and turn into a tree like yours did on the side of your house."

"That weed?" he laughed, pointing at it. "Turns out it's a pecan tree!"

Wow, a pecan tree. I had no idea they could just grow out from under your house like that. But then I had no idea my own patchy front yard could sustain a lush little vegetable garden, either. In fact, if not for my girl, the yard would be as barren as a desert bed, I'm sure. But as the saying goes, "We have children so we can believe everything all over again." So it turns out a weed can become a tree after all. Today, there is an actual apple sapling in our front yard, with blossoms and everything. My daughter has no doubt whatsoever that it grew from a seed she planted, and neither do I. ■

Gillespie's latest book is Trailer Trashed: My Dubious Efforts Toward Upward Mobility. *Read her blog and learn more about her writing seminars at shockingreallife.com*

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER ARKLE

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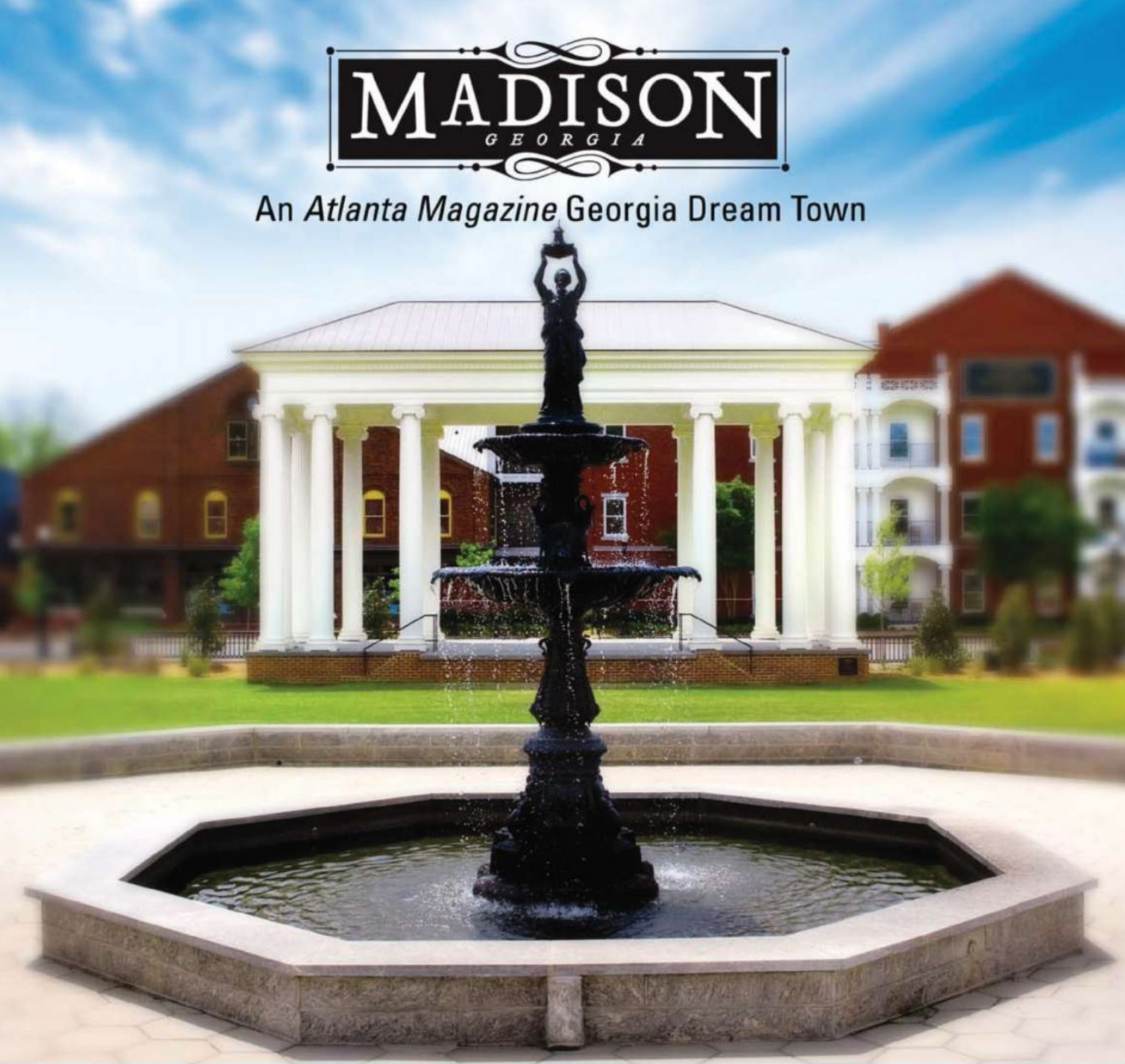

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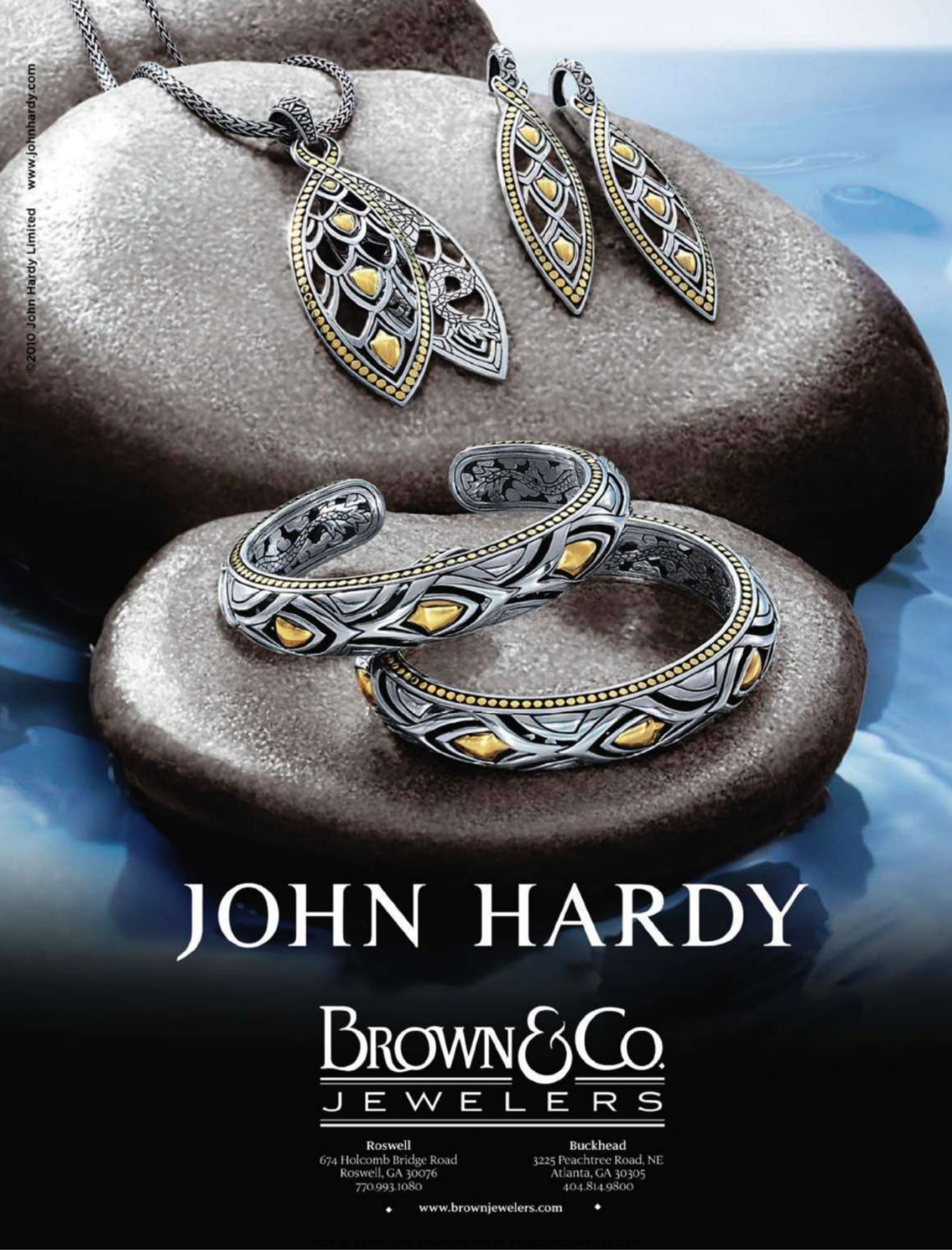

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